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THE WARNING.

A LEGEND

OF THE

TOWER OF LONDON.

BY

J. H. HAINSFORTH.

ILLUSTRATED WITH COSTLY ENGRAVINGS.

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PREFACE.

It is with a feeling of the deepest gratitude that the Editor addresses himself to those numerous friends whose patronage has raised this work to a circulation unprecedented in the annuals of literature. At the commencement of our labours, it is true, we were assailed by a host of pirates, but, thanks to a discriminating public, we soon dispersed them, and became triumphant masters of the sea. This victory we owe to the encouragement offered by our friends,—the public, and we now thank them for it from the bottom of our editorial hearts.

We have also to thank the gentlemen of the press, for the highly flattering terms in which they have spoken of our labours:—Newspapers, daily and weekly, have united with one voice, to express the most favourable opinions of our work; —magazines, monthly, as well as quarterly, have freely offered their valuable testimony in our behalf, whilst several foreign publications have reviewed this work, translating many extracts for the benefit of their readers. In fact, were we to make merely a selection from the reviews that have favourably noticed us, a closely printed sheet would scarcely be-sufficient for the purpose.

One cause of our success may be found in the deep and thrilling interest that is attached to the majestic edifice that gives title to our work. Every one is aware of the horrors that have been perpetrated within those walls where many of our monarchs have found both a prison and a palace. The fate of the beauteous Lady Jane Grey occupies a prominent share in the history of our country; her sorrows and vicissitudes have been universally deplored, and there are few portions of our annals that contain so many stirring incidents, applicable alike to the historian and the romancist.

And now, gentle readers, farewell;—our pleasing task is accomplished, and the only thought that reconciles us to parting with you, is the hope that we shall shortly meet again under equally gratifying circumstances.

July, 2*0th*, 1840.

A LEGEND

OF THE

TOWER OF LONDON.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROCLAMATION OF QUEEN JANE, AND THE MANNER IN WHICH SHE WAS CONDUCTED TO THE TOWER.

ON the death of King Edward the Sixth being made known to the public, the proud and imperious Duke of Northumberland sent letters to the Mayor and commonalty of the City of London, signifying his wishes that they should fetch the Lady Jane Gray from Durham House, in the Strand to the Tower, and see the City ordered and garnished with pageants in the accustomed places, to honour her passage through it. In consequence, a Common Council was called, and commands issued to all the companies to prepare barges, and to garnish them, both with all the scenely banners they could procure, and with targets on the sides, and in every barge to have minstrelsy, among which were the now long explored instruments, called shalms and sackbutts.

On the 10th of July, 1553, the day appointed for the water triumph, the Mayor and his brethren, all in scarlet, such as were knights, having collars of S.S., and the remainder gold chains, and the Council of the City with them, assembled at St. Mary's Hill, and at one o'clock took barge. The barges in number amounted to fifty, and they were enjoined under a great penalty not to row nearer to one another than at twice a barge's length, and to enforce this order there were three light wherries, each with two officers.

They then set forth in the following order:—First, at a good distance before the Mayor's barge was a foist or wafter full of ordnance, having in the midst a great dragon continually moving and casting wild fire, and round about it terrible monsters and wild men, also casting fire, and making hideous noises.

On the right hand of the Mayor's barge was that of the bachelors, in which were trumpets and several other melodious instruments; its decks, sailyards, and topcastles were hung with cloth of gold and silk, at the foreship and the stern were two great banners, richly beaten with the arms of Queen Jane, and in the topcastle also was a long streamer newly beaten with the said arms. The sides of the barge were set full of flags and banners of devices, and the chords were hung with innumerable pencels, having little bells at the ends which made "a goodly noise and a goodly sight," waving in the wind. On the outside of the barge were thirty-six escutcheons, in metal, bearing also the Queen's arms.

Next, after the Mayor, followed his company; next, after them, the Mercers, then the Grocers, and so every company in its order; and after all, the Mayor's and Sheriff's officers.

In this order, "a goodly sight" for splendour, and each barge provided with its own ministry, they rowed to Durham House, where they cast anchor until the royal party should be ready to join them. All this time bombards and culverins were discharged from the banks of the river, yet was it manifest that the people regarded the whole affair with apprehension, and that they still regarded the Princess Mary as the rightful successor to the throne, which had just become vacant. True she was a Catholic, but she had always been looked forward to as the future Sovereign, and a vast majority of the late king's subjects had resolved to support her rights against any one who might be brought forward by her enemies.

Besides, it was well known to the people, in general, that the ambitious Duke of Northumberland had, in his frequent conversations with the late King, taken occasion to represent to the dying King the danger to which the reformation would be exposed, should his sister Mary succeed to the throne of England. To be sure, no such objection lay against the Princess Elizabeth, but then, it was argued, he could not with any propriety exclude one sister without also excluding the other. These two principles, therefore, being set aside, the succession devolved on the Marchioness of Dorset, eldest daughter of the Duke of Suffolk, and the French Queen, his youngest sister; and that the apparent successor to the Marchioness was her daughter, Lady Jane Gray, who was every way worthy of a crown, and who, being of the same age as the King, had been educated with him, and had commanded his esteem and admiration, by the progress she had made in every branch of literature. He had enjoyed full opportunity of becoming acquainted with the purity of her religious principles, a circumstance that weighed with him above every other consideration in the choice of a successor; and, it seems, besides, probable, that her elegant person and amiable disposition had inspired his heart with a tender affection.

But the crafty Northumberland had views of his own to accomplish, and finding that he was likely to carry his principle point with the King, he began to propose the other parts of his ambitious scheme. Two sons of the Duke of Suffolk having lately died, that title was become extinct. Northumberland, persuaded the King to bestow it upon the Marquis of Dorset; and by means of this and other favours, he obtained from the new Duke and Duchess of Suffolk, their eldest daughter, Lady Jane, in marriage to his fourth son, Lord Guildford Dudley. Shortly after this, the Duchess of Suffolk gave place to her daughter, Lady Jane, for whom she was well aware the change in the succession had been made.

The King died soon after this singular transaction, and so much the sooner by being put into the hands of an ignorant woman, who undertook to restore him, in a little time, to his former state of health. On the death of Edward the Sixth, Northumberland saw that further dissimulation would be useless; he, therefore, went to Sion House, where Lady Jane Gray resides, accompanied by a body of the nobility, and approaching her with the respect usually paid to the Sovereign, informed her of her elevation. Lady Jane, who was in a great measure ignorant of the intrigues of her father-in-law, received this information with equal grief and surprise. She even refused to accept the crown; pleaded the preferable title of the two Princesses; expressed her dread of the consequences attending an enterprise so dangerous, and begged to remain in that private station in which she was born, Overcome, however, at last, by the entreaties, rather than the reasons of her relatives, she submitted to their will; and Northumberland immediately conveyed her to London, where he lodged her in Durham House, as we have said in the opening of this narration. This, once more brings us to the main incidents of our story, and we will now resume at the point where he broke off to explain matters to the reader.

Whilst the civic barges were waiting off the princely residence of Northumberland, and during the period that the procession accompanying Queen Jane was slowly making its way for the purpose of embarkation, two persons dressed in their episcopal robes, paused to gaze upon the splendid array before them. These personages were the celebrated Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, and the equally well-known Ridley, Bishop of London. Their countenances expressed doubt and sorrow, for they knew the violent opposition that would be raised against the accession of Queen Jane, and though they had themselves lent her their support against the pretensions of a Papist, yet they felt assured of the hopelessness of a cause which was unpopular with the multitude. Cranmer was the first to speak, and whispering in the ear of his friend, so as not to be heard by anybody else, he said mournfully:—

"The people, my Lord Bishop, look but coldly on whilst we go in triumph to bear our beauteous Queen to the palace of her ancestors. Methinks their silence is ominous, and already do I fear the course for which we have laboured is lost."

"I am afraid there is but too much truth in your Grace's remark," answered Ridley in the same low tone. "The people everywhere receive her with apathy, and even the fears of having a Papist for a Sovereign weigh but little against the rights of the Princess Mary, who even now, as I understand, is calling upon the nobility and commoners to aid in raising her to the throne of England."

"Then, my Lord, it behoves us to stir the populace against her by every means in our power," returned Crammer, "Our pulpits must be turned into forums, and from thence must the clergy pour forth their anathemas upon all who dare to support the pretensions of a bigottod Catholic against their rightful Sovereign, Queen Jane."

"Nay, my Lord Archbishop, that were a vain and fruitless task," answered Ridley, "for this morning, I preached to the stiff-necked commons from St. Paul's Cross, and though I tried to impress upon them the duty of obedience to our Sovereign, Lady Jane, yet did they hear me with impatience, and I could observe among them a sullen resolution to support her whose accession to the throne we have so much reason to dread."

"You think then our cause is irretrievably lost?"

"I fear it is," replied Ridley, "and yet who shall say but heaven will even now raise up a power in aid of us, that we at present little dream of. The cause, my Lord Archbishop, is a holy one,—the best interests of the reformed church depend upon its success, and as a Christian, I cannot believe that we shall again be be brought under the subjection of the Pope."

"Yet, if Mary gains the crown," exclaimed Crammer, "who shall say how soon you and I, and other faithful servants of the church may meet the death of martyrs?"

"True, your Grace," replied the Bishop of London, "and yet, were such an event to come to pass, I believe neither you nor I, nor any other zealous Protestant, would shrink from whatever tortures our enemies might chose to afflict us with."

Cranmer bowed his head in token of acquiescence, but as the crowd began to gather more closely around them, they forbore for the present from making any further observations upon a subject that was so dangerous.

The work of embarkation was now proceeding slowly, and presently afterwards when a stoppage took place, two nobles,—evidently foreigners, —stepped aside from the throng, and entered into earnest conversation with each other. One of these was Antoine de Noailles, at that time Ambassador in England from Henry the Second of France, and the other M. Simon Renard, who performed a similar duty for his Imperial Master, Charles the Fifth of Spain. They were attired in superb dresses of the fashion of the period. and by the haughtiness of their conduct seemed to avoid any communication with those among whom they were now thrown. Both of them seemed to regard the scene with dislike, but more particularly was that feeling exhibited by Monsieur Renard, whose dark austere frown showed the utter hatred and contempt in which he held out those who were taking part against the Princess Mary.

"True," replied the French Ambassador, "but her friends have stolen a march upon us, and I almost fear the hopes of Mary are at an end."

"These proud English seem to think they are carrying every thing their own way." he observed to de Noailles, "but little guess they the plots that are hatching for the destruction of her they have made their idol. The Lady Jane has accepted the crown, but who shall say the bauble will ever decorate her head?"

"By the Holy Virgin thou art wrong, de Noailles," exclaims the haughty and intriguing Spaniards, "I have sworn to elevate Mary to the throne,—the maintenance of our religion in this country depends upon my success, and even though I were to lose my life, it should be cheerfully laid down in a cause I hold so sacred."

"But each hour that passes seems to lessen our chance of success," observed de Noailles doubtfully.

"And why should even an hour be suffered to pass without consummating our wishes?" demanded the other. "We have friends zealous in the cause; the chief nobility of England favour the Princess Mary; and even the commoners will rise against the pretensions of the rival whom Northumberland has exalted in furtherance of his own ambitious schemes."

"And yet, between ourselves, Renard," answered the French ambassador, with peculiar emphasis, "These English people are jealous of foreigners, and, in my opinion, they would rather trust to the wily Duke of Northumberland than rely upon the intrigues of either Spaniard or Frenchman."

"But the Spaniard," returned the other quickly, "may have improved his opportunities, whilst the Frenchman has been slumbering at his post. These people have discovered that I may be of service to them, and therefore will they trust their destinies in my hands."

"And if they do," exclaimed de Noailles, "these islanders will soon find themselves involved in a civil war."

"Not if I play my cards skilfully," answered Renard; the Princess Mary is a favourite with these people, and the numbers that advocate her cause would speedily suppress any inclination on the part of her enemies to risk their lives in support of her rival. I have made sure calculations on the subject, Monseur De Noailles, and take my word for it, the reign of Lady Jane Gray will terminate almost at the same hour that has seen her accession to the throne."

"Heaven grant it may be so!" exclaimed the courtly Frenchman, "our royal masters watch the signs of the times with intense interest, and our own reward depends upon the degree of success that follows our labours. I have been promised a dukedom if I succeed in my plots against Queen Jane, and you may rest assured that I shall labour earnestly in an affair that holds but so alluring a temptation."

"Why is it then, that, up to this time, you have done nothing that can in any way further your projects?"

"Because there has hitherto been no opportunity," answered de Noailles; "Northumberland keeps a watchful eye upon all whom he suspects, and I have more than once fancied that, both by words and actions, he has given pretty broad hints that I am not the most welcome visitor to the English Court."

"A word in your ear, de Noailles," whispered Renard—"hist! let not a word be heard! There is a plot a foot in which I act no inconsiderable a part, and whereby ous wishes are about to be attained. Will you make one of us, and thus aid in a cause, which I know, in your own heart, you approve?"

"I will; but is the Lady Jane marked out for death?"

"That must depend on circumstances," answered the other. "If possible her life will be spared, but should it be necessary, there are those among us who will doom her to destruction, rather than hazard the plot on which so much depends."

"'Tis a desperate game we play," exclaimed de Noailles, "but the necessity is great that urges us on. Northumberland has overreached himself, and 'tis for us to take advantage of the first occasion that offers."

"He dies!" muttered the Spaniard between his clenched teeth.

"Ha! and when?"

"That will depend on circumstances," answered the other. "We, who have doomed it, thus meet to-night in secret—shall I introduce you to the friends of a good cause?"

"First, I would know who they are?"

"Nay, that cannot be till you have taken our oath of secrecy," exclaimed Renard. "I have already told you more than I ought to have done, but a perfect reliance on your honour, assures me that the confidence is not misplaced. Will you accompany me to the meeting of our friends"

"Aye, marry will I," answered de Noailles; "the plot—if I understand you rightly—is against my Lord of Northumberland, and I care not how great is the punishment with which he is visited, even though it be visited with death itself."

"'Tis well," exclaimed the Spaniard, "and henceforth we are leagued together as brothers; but hush!—the crowd again moves on, and we shall be observed by our ever watchful enemies—remember, be cautious and vigilant, for the hour is at hand when our foe shall perish."

At this moment the royal pageant was seen leaving Durham House, on its way towards the water side. Before the Queen walked, a number of Gentlemen and Knights, their Judges, their Doctors, their Bishops, their Lords, then the Council; after whom, followed the Knights of the Bath in their robes; the Bishop of Winchester, Lord High Treasurer; next came the Earl of Shrewsbury, and after him, the Earl of Pembroke, who bore the sword; and the Mayor of London, in a gown of crimson velvet, bore the sceptre of gold.

Next came the Dukes of Northumberland and Suffolk, and immediately following him, was Queen Jane, pale and faint, with apprehension for the step she had thus been induced to take. Young and lovely—for she was then only sixteen years of age—her appearance could not fail to excite admiration, even from those who were her avowed enemies. On the present occasion she was apparelled in white cloth of gold of damask, with a mantle of the same, furred with ermine, fastened before her with gold and silk, and rich knobs of gold, tasseled at the ends; her beautiful fair hair hanging down plain behind her back, with a caul of cloth of tinsel, set with pearls and stones, and above it a round circlet of gold, also so richly set with precious stones, that the value of it was inestimable. On her passage to the barge, her train was borne by a noble lady whose grace and beauty were scarcely inferior to her own. Close by her side, walked her youthful husband, Lord Guildford Dudley, whose appearance was hailed with murmurs of disapprobation by those who regarded his marriage with the Lady Jane, as an act of ambition not to be easily pardoned.

A little apart from the procession, walked the Earl of Pembroke and Sir William Cecil, the latter of whom, under the reign of Queen Elizabeth, rose to the highest office in the state, and who is known to posterity as the great Lord Burleigh. These two were engaged in deep and earnest conversation, for—like most other people—they were opposed to Queen Jane, and were, moreover, engaged in the plot that was forming against the life of the Duke of Northumberland.

"My Lord of Pembroke," exclaimed Sir William, "there is evil news abroad, which, if true, will go far to endanger our lives and fortunes. 'Tis said that some dastard has betrayed our designs to the proud Duke, and I scarcely need observe to you, that if such indeed, should be the fact, our hopes are for ever frustrated."

"Nay, Cecil," answered the Earl, "be assured by me that this is some idle report raised only for the purpose of seeing the effect it will have on us. Northumberland still smiles upon us, and you know as well as myself, that if he only suspected the share we have in the transaction, our hero would have answered for it long enough since."

"True," replied Sir William Cecil," unless he has some motive for remaining quiet a short time longer. The Duke is artful as he is ambitious, and I fear we will somehow or other contrive to discover our plot before it is ripe for execution."

"Psha!" ejaculated the Earl of Pembroke, "we have one among us who is fully able to cope with Northumberland, artful and suspicious as he may be. Monsieur Renard has joined himself to our league, and that alone is sufficient to warrant the success of our plan. But see!—some one has just approached the Duke and presented him with a paper! By heavens! his grace starts, and no doubt he has discovered the mine that was about to explode for his destruction."

"As Northumberland finished reading the letter, he turned to a nobleman by his side who was in his confidence, and exclaimed:—

"By heaven, my lord, there is treachery among those who ought to be the truest friends of her Majesty. This epistle warns me of a plot that has been hatched, and had it not been for our unknown friend, there is little doubt we should have fallen into the snare of those who seek our ruin."

"Does your Grace know the names of the guilty parties?" asked the other anxiously.

"Not of all," answered the Duke of Northumberland, "but some of them are mentioned here, and particularly the plotting Monsieur Simon Renard, who, no doubt, has been set on to commit the foul crime by his master, the haughty King of Spain. But their machinations are brought to a sudden close, so now let them look to it, for the axe shall soon rid us of foes who it is dangerous to keep near us any longer."

"Does your Grace know the object of the vile plotting?" enquired the nobleman.

"Not precisely," answered Northumberland, "and yet have I learnt enough to know that one portion of their designs is to restore the Catholic Religion in these realms, by raising the Princess Mary to the throne of England."

"Yet methinks," exclaimed the nobleman, "that would be no easy task, seeing that we are before-hand with them, and that Lady Jane has been proclaimed our Queen. The people, it is true, have not greeted her with that warmth and loyalty which I should have been glad to have seen, but she has possession of the throne, and it will be no easy task for them to drive her from it:"

"Let us hope it may be so," replied the Duke," and yet I would gladly give half I possess in the world, to see these evil plotters totally discomfitted. The Princess Mary has written to most of the nobility, laying claim to the crown of England, which she says is hers by right of birth, and calling upon them to aid in carrying her cause to a successful termination. Mary, I believe, has promised to assist her, and there is but too much reason to fear that a cruel civil war will be the immediate consequence."

At this moment, a cry of horror was raised, and turning his eyes towards Queen Jane, he beheld an aged beldame flourishing a dagger in her hand, which she was in the act of aiming against the life of the young and lovely Princess. In an instant, however, the fatal weapon was wrenched from her grasp by one of the bystanders, and thus was Queen Jane preserved from the frantic attack of a maniac, who no one doubted had been set on to accomplish the task by some of the Princess

Mary's emissaries. At that juncture a hundred swords were drawn for the punishment of the infuriated woman, but just then, her son,—a young man of mean appearance, rushed forward,—and implored them in an earnest tone to save the life of his parent.

CHAPTER II.

THE MANIAC MOTHER AND THE WARNING SHE GIVES TO THE LADY JANE.—THE ROYAL PROGRESS RESUMED.

AMONG the first to recover from the consternation into which the above mentioned attempt at assassination had thrown the party, was the Duke of Northumberland, who immediately advancing towards the frenzied woman and her son, demanded, in a fierce voice, by whose contrivance this foul attempt at murder had been so nearly executed. But the maniac seemed not to fear the anger and probable doom she had thus brought upon herself, and it was not till a couple of soldiers were preparing to drag her son away that she seemed to entertain the least fear of the consequence. At the moment, however, that she saw the young man in the custody of Northumberland's followers, she rushed forward with a loud cry of anguish, and throwing herself at the feet of Lady Jane, implored her in piteous accents to spare the life of one who is dearer to her than all the world besides. But the Duke's heart was not to be softened by the prayers of the unhappy mother, and beckoning to the captain of the guard, he exclaimed:—

"Bear this old hag to prison with her son, and see that they are both brought before the Council to-morrow, in order that we may by torture, wring from them the secret they would conceal. We will discover who are the evil instigators to this foul crime, and then let the guilty abettors tremble, for I swear to have deadly vengeance against all who have plotted against the life of their royal mistress!"

As Northumberland spoke he glanced round upon several of those who he believed to be enemies of Queen Jane, and then hastening back to his royal daughter-in-law, entreated her to proceed with as little delay as possible, in order to seek shelter in her barge from a tempest which had long been threatening and was now ready to burst over them. But Jane's compassion had been excited in favour of the maniac, from whose dagger she had just been rescued, and addressing the Duke in an earnest tone, she enquired anxiously what he intended to do with the prisoners.

"That, your Majesty, will depend upon circumstances," answered Northumberland—"we will wring from the hag the names of those by whom she has been employed, and if she answers our questions fairly, perhaps her life, and that of her son, may be spared on consideration that they pass the remainder of their days in a prison."

"And yet, methinks, my Lord of Northumberland," answered the Queen, "that would be a bad commencement of our reign, seeing that we have already but few friends to support us against those who side with the Princess Mary. Mercy is one of the fairest prerogatives of the crown, and rather would I lay down these vain trappings of royalty, than stain my hands thus early with the blood of one, whose murderous intent has been frustrated."

"Your Majesty will consider that an example must be made, or our foes will think we dare not punish their treason, for fear of encountering their further hostility."

"Let them think so if they will," answered the Queeen, "for better

would it be to give our enemies an advantage, such as you speak of, than revengefully to destroy those who have not harmed us. The woman seems to be crazed, and I would myself ask her a few questions, in order to learn her motives for seeking my death."

Northumberland knew that remonstrance would be in vain, and giving orders to his page, he directed him to command that the woman and her son should be brought before her Majesty. Within a few moments, therefore, the two prisoners were conducted to the place where Lady Jane was waiting for them; but they were, by this time, assured of their safety, and both of them waited in sullen silence, the questions that were about to be put to them.

" I know not wherefore thou art my enemies" said the Queen, addressing herself to the prisoners, " but my life had nearly fallen a sacrifice to your cruel hatred, and I would now by an act of mercy convert thee into friends. You shall be restored to liberty, and may heaven change your hearts towards one whom fortune, and not her own ambition has raised to this perilous eminence."

" If you are aware of the peril, why not seek to avoid it by spurning the crown that has been offered?" asked the woman.

" Peace, beldame!" exclaimed Northumberland fiercely, " thou hast heard her Majesty's most gracious promise of pardon, and on thy knees thou shouldst return thanks for a boon you had so little right to expect.

" Mable Calcroft spurns the offer when it is made by one whom she does not acknowledge as her sovereign," answered the woman. " I have lived to see the rightful heir thrust aside, in order that her enemies may trample upon our holy religion, and now I care not how soon the term of my wretched existence is brought to a close."

"Thy words prove thee to be an implacable foe," cried the Queen meekly," yet thou hast found me ready to save thy life when it was forfeited by thine own treachery."

"For which I do not thank you," exclaimed Mable.

"Remember," interposed Northumberland," you are still in our power and it is possible that to insure the safety of our Sovereign Lady, we may yet order you into strict confinement."

"Spare my son and I care not what you do with myself," replied the old woman—"he is guiltless of any crime against her you have raised to the throne, and surely you would not make the innocent suffer for the crimes of others."

"I have said you shall both be set at liberty," returned the Queen, "and my word shall not be forfeited, even though I may place myself in some peril by setting you at large."

"Your generosity shall not be thrown away upon me," exclaimed Mable, "for my son's sake I thank you for your mercy, though it would little matter how soon I found peace for my own aching heart in the grave."

"Heaven send that your Majesty may not have reason to repent this act of mercy," exclaimed the Duke of Northumberland. "She has once failed in her diabolical scheme, and be assured she will never desist until her object has been fatally accomplished."

"My lord wrongs me!" cried Mable vehemently. "He believes me to be capable of ingratitude, whereas I am only anxious to repay the boon I have received by the performance of a service to her, who has reserved me from the wrath of cruel and vindictive men.

"Then go your ways," cried the Duke, "and if you really are grateful for the service, never again dare to approach her whom you had devoted to destruction."

"Nay, before I go," replied Mable, "let me entreat of the lady Jane to abandon a throne which is not hers by right. She has many enemies at work to procure her death by assassination, but she may yet save herself by resigning the crown of England to her cousin Mary."

"Most cheerfully would I do so," exclaimed the Queen," were it not that I believe the maintenance of the Protestant religion depends upon my yielding my own wishes to those of men who are only anxious to perform a service to the nation."

"Your Majesty loses time," exclaimed Northumberland as a loud peal of thunder burst upon their ears—"the tempest has broken forth, and we shall scarcely have time to reach the barge ere the rain pours down in torrents."

"The tempest is but an omen of that which is to follow if her ladyship persits in going to the Tower," cried Mable. "I hear the warning voice of heaven in each thunder-clap, and gladly would I prevail upon her to abandon a project which can only end in her speedy destruction."

"Avaunt thou hag!" exclaimed the Duke wrathfully, "thy life has been graciously spared by her Majesty, and let your gratitude be exhibited by instantly quitting this place."

"Or if she will not depart," cried Lord Guildford Dudley, "let her and her son be dragged from our presence and taken to a prison where she may be kept till the further pleasure of her Majesty is known."

"My dear Lord" interposed the Queen, "let us not deal harshly with one who is old and witless. She has received my pardon, and I would that she be suffered to depart in peace."

"Thou art kind of heart even as thy face is fair and beautiful to look upon," exclaimed Mable. "As a foe to thee and thy religion I came to take thy life, but thou hast converted my hatred into love, and I depart with sorrow, knowing, as I do, that thy future destiny is brief and sad."

"Then I have no longer to fear danger from thy hands?" said the Queen,—"thy heart is softened towards me, and I who have many foes, have made a good friend, even where I had but little reason to expect it."

"I do not hate thee, lady, as I did," answered the old woman, "and my feelings have warmed towards thee, though I know thee as the rival of her who is our rightful Sovereign."

"Perdition seize the hag!" exclaimed Northumberland fiercely, "dost thou dare to bandy words with us, and moreover to tell thy Royal Mistress that she is an usurper?—By heaven this treason is not to be borne, and unless you instantly take your departure, my followers shall force you to some dungeon where your evil croaking shall never more be heard."

Awed by the voice and manner of the Duke, the old woman turned to depart, but ere she had moved half a dozen paces from the spot, the voice of the Lady Jane once more caused her to turn round.

"Stay," cried the Queen, in a voice of compassion, "before you go I would give you this trinket, by which access to me may at any time be readily obtained. I would gladly see you in private, for something assures me that you have been grievously wronged, and if so, it shall be my care to allay the anguish of those wounds that have been inflicted on you."

With these words she presented Mable with a broach, and the old woman was once more about to depart with her son when one of the attendants struck the youth a severe blow over the back, and at the same time ordered him to return and pay his obeisance to her Majesty. But Richard Calcroft turned a haughty look of defiance upon his assailant, and muttering loud enough to be overheard, he exclaimed:—

"Let those who have raised up this idol bow down and worship her. She is no Queen of mine, nor will I ever give my allegiance to one who has been raised to the throne to the exclusion of her whose right no good man dares to dispute."

"Dog!—thou liest!" cried Northumberland, whose ear had caught the last words which had been uttered. "Queen Jane is acknowledged by all those who love their country and religion;—she is the free choice of her people, and if there be any one present of noble descent who dares deny her right, I am here to give him battle whenever he may think fit to say aught against her who now owns the crown of England."

"Nay, sir," interposted Lord Guildford Dudley, the youthful husband of the Queen,—"let this slave be cast into prison to answer for the treason he has spoken against her Majesty. These are perilious times, my Lord, and unless and example is made of some of the traitors we shall soon find ourselves overpowered by those who have thought fit to array themselves against us as enemies. Let the man be taken to prison, and to-morrow the Council shall examine him so as to sift the intentions of our foes to the bottom."

"If you love me, Guildford," cried the Queen, "you will not seek to harm either this man or his mother. My reign has lasted but a few hours, perhaps a few more may see me deposed in favour of my cousin, Mary. Let us not, then, act the tyrant during the brief period we are permitted to wield the destinies of this fair and happy land."

"Your Majesty shall be obeyed," replied Northumberland, "though it must be confessed that mercy in the present instance is scarcely called for. The man shall be released, but let him beware how he again tries our patience, for his life shall answer it if he dares breathe a word of treason against our Queen."

Richard Calcroft would have risked this, but at the moment both he and his mother were hurried away by three or four soldiers, and once more the procession moved on towards the water side. By this time the tempest was growling angrily over-head, and the scene, which a short period before had been so fair and serene was now changed, and gloomy in the extreme. The lightnings flashed almost continuously, and the deep-rolling thunder added in no inconsiderable degree to the awe with which every body was struck. Hitherto, however, no rain had fallen, but scarcely had the royal party, and those who formed the royal procession, entered their covered boats, than a torrent descended which for violence has seldom been exceeded.

Seated in her state barge, and surrounded as she was by those only whose faith and honour she could rely, the Queen could not, nevertheless, help regarding the present fearful war with the elements as a fatal omen of that which was to follow in her own career. Even the raillery of her husband, the Lord Guildford Dudley, failed to restore her spirits, and resting her forehead on his shoulder, she wept at the dark reflections that passed hurriedly through her mind. At last the storm spent its fury, and as the clouds gradually and slowly rolled away, the cheerful light of heaven returned, and with it came back a portion of those spirits which the unhappy Queen had lost. Lord Dudley took advantage of this favourable change, and pressing his lips to her pale cheek he said gaily :—

"You see, dearest, how quickly this conflict of the elements has been brought to a close;—the darkness which enshrouded the heaven has passed away, and the sun again breaks forth to cheer and enlighten us."

"And so will it be in the affair which now engages us," added the Duke of Northumberland, in a tone of encouragement; "a momentary gloom has enveloped us, but a very short time will serve to dispel the dark cloud of faction, and to strengthen our Queen in the hearts of those she is called upon to govern."

"Alas! I fear not," answered the Queen mournfully, "my destiny is known only to heaven, but in my own heart I feel assured that an early grave will close upon her who has been called forth from retirement to rule over those who despise and hate her."

"Nay," cried the Duke, "thy destiny is a far brighter one than thou seemest to imagine. As sole Monarch of these realms thou wilt soon be acknowledged even by those who are now enemies."

"That can never be," answered Jane, "for my foes regard me as an usurper of the throne I have been forced to mount, and for my own part, care not how soon they compel me to descend from it."

"Your Majesty," exclaimed Northumberland solemnly, "forgets that your grave lies at the foot of that throne you would yield up."

"And even if it were so," sighed the unhappy Queen, "I should gladly seek a refuge in it from the cares with which I am surrounded. It has been one of the chief objects of my life to win the esteem of friends, and yet who is there at this moment that has so many enemies as I have?"

"Your Grace forgets that royalty can make friends as well as enemies," replied the Duke. "The common herd of people care not who governs the state, so that they feel not the oppression of the hand that rules them. Perform but one popular act, and the public voice will instantly be raised in your favour, in spite of the clamour that may be raised against you by those who favour the pretensions of your rival, the Princess Mary."

"Alas! I would that she occupied the throne instead of myself," cried the Lady Jane; "it is a perilous eminence to gain, and to one of my habits the station is any thing but an enviable one. Surrounded by my books, and with the society of my husband, I could have passed through life happy and contented. But now the tear of regret is seldom absent from my eye, and the memory of the past only serves to render the more terrible the prospects of the future. To many, my lot may appear to be a splendid one, but you know not with what joy I would exchange situations with the humblest peasant girl that is to be found in my dominions."

"These gloomy anticipations are little suited to the occasion we have assembled to celebrate," exclaimed the Duke. "But we have now reached the ancient fortress of London, where it is usual for the Sovereigns of England to pass the few first days of their reign, preparatory to taking up their residence at Westminster. See, the grim portals of the Tower open to receive you, and your triumph is complete."

"Methinks the place looks more like a prison than a palace," cried the Queen, shuddering as she gazed upon the frowning walls of the fortress." 'Tis a fearful place to look upon, and a something tells me that within that spot I shall pass the darkest and most unhappy hours of my existence."

But the Duke of Northumberland affected not to hear these words of his royal daughter-in-law, and making a sign to Lord Guildford Dudley, he expressed his impatience to land. Nor was the hint thrown away upon the young nobleman, who, jumping hastily from his seat, took the hand of his beauteous wife, and led her towards the place from whence a temporary platform had been erected for the occasion. A few moments served to bring them within the Tower, where the crown and other ensigns of royalty were presented by some of the noblemen who were favourable to her cause. From thence they proceeded through numerous gates and across the bridge that spans the moat, until they reached that part of the venerable structure which contained the apartments usually occupied by the Sovereign on similar occasions.

Here the young and lovely Queen was allowed to rest a little after the fatigue produced by pomp, but her heart was still oppressed by a load of anguish, and in spite of all the attempts at raillery made by her husband, she was at that moment, perhaps, the most unhappy woman in her dominions.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE READER LEARNS SOMETHING ABOUT THE LOVE-SICK SQUIRE AND THE FAIR SYBILLA; THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT, OR GREAT AND LITTLE PEOPLE IN PERILOUS CONTACT.

Among those who entered the Tower in procession was Gilbert Hemingsly, the young and chivalrous esquire of the Duke of Northumberland, who was about as notorious for falling in love with every pretty girl he chanced to meet with as his master was for his noble name and acts of vaulting ambition. The latter, it is true, is remembered down to the present day, whilst the other would have been altogether forgotten had not we reserved his name from oblivion by giving him a place in these pages. Poor Gilbert, we have said, had a most susceptible heart whenever any of the fair sex happened to fall in his way; his heart might be likened to tinder, which is ever ready to receive and retain a spark which is ultimately to consume it. Twenty times had he vowed unalterable love to as many young maidens, and yet twenty times had he proved his own fickleness by transferring his affections to some other quarter. Still, however, he was possessed of many excellent qualities,—was noble and generous in disposition, was ever ready to aid a friend, and, withal, was one of the most faithful and trust-worthy of esquires. It was chiefly on this latter account that he was regarded by Northumberland, and so completely was his confidence reposed in him, that Gilbert Hemingsley was constantly in attendance upon him, though there were at least half-a-score of others engaged to undertake the duties of that office in their turns.

Now it so happened that whilst the procession was entering the Tower, the attention of our young esquire was arrested by hearing the screams of a female, and turning round to ascertain from whence they proceeded, he saw a beautiful girl struggling in the midst of the crowd, and apparently sinking through the terrible pressure she had been made to endure. On perceiving this, he was about to rush to her rescue, but at that moment the crowd gave way—an opening was formed through the dense mass of human beings, and the almost fainting girl was carried away he knew not whither.

This was provoking enough to a young gallant like Gilbert, and he would have followed to learn who she was and where she lived, but at that moment the Duke beckoned him to approach, and he was sent forward to make preparations for the reception of his Royal Mistress. Thus situated, he had no alternative, and hurrying on to that part of the fortress in which the Royal residence was situated, he performed, in no very good humour, the task that had been given him, and then waited with impatience until the arrival of her Majesty should give him an opportunity to make the necessary enquiries after his fair inamorata. At last the desired moment came, and slipping out of the apartment as soon as he conveniently could, he sallied forth to ask of the first person he might meet with the name and station of the fair maiden whose pretty face had made so deep an impression on his heart. But it was in vain that he sought for information—the crowd was by this time entirely dispersed, and the few persons he here and there met were too busily engaged in their own affairs to stop and talk with him about his. Vexed at his disappointment he was going to make his way across the court yard, when feeling a smart tug at his cloak, he turned round to see who had done it, when his eyes alighted on a little dapper fellow whose size was that of a child, whilst his age appeared to be that of a man. In spite of his previous ill-humour Gilbert could scarcely forbear laughing at his singular little abridgment of a man, and then finding that the dwarf still kept a firm hold of his cloak, he enquired what he wanted of him.

"You are a stranger here," answered the little fellow, "and yet I have already discovered that you have been striken to the heart by the bright eyes of a woman."

"Of a woman! say rather of an angel!" cried the enthusiastic youth with some impetuosity.

"Well, an angel, if you will have it," answered the dwarf, "though, between ourselves, I have been so jilted by the girls that I am beginning to rail against the whole sex. They have absolutely laughed at what they call my presumption in paying my addresses to them, and it is scarce a week since one of the mischievous sluts put me in an empty cistern on the Devil's Battery, and there left me till my cries prosecution brought a couple of the warders to my assistance."

"And was it to tell me of this, that I have been interrupted in the of a most important affair?" demanded Gilbert angrily.

"Most worthy squire, let your anger be moderated till I have done," exclaimed the dwarf. "Have I not guessed rightly when I said you had lost your heart since you have been in the Tower, and may I not be of use, think you, in affording a clue to your lady love?"

"Psha! this is foolery!" cried the young man impatiently; "the secret is safely locked up in the recesses of my heart, and yet you have the presumption to say that you have discovered what is unknown to all the world."

"You shall judge whether it is presumption then," returned the dwarf, chuckling with delight at his own penetration. "The maiden of whom I speak, stood amidst the throng, and the vile herd pressed so closely that she was fain to call out hastily for assistance. At that moment, I noted your demeanour;--you would have flown to her assistance, but she was conveyed away before you could do so, and never did I see so much disappointment as your face exhibited when she was carried from your sight."

"It must be owned I was vexed," answered Gilbert, "but not more so than I shall be with yourself unless you at once put an end to my doubts by revealing to me the name of the damsel you have just spoken of."

"And what will be the consequence of my refusing to do so?" asked the little fellow pertly—

"A broken pate for thy pains," answered Gilbert,—"that is to say if thou wert of a size for a man to punish as you deserve."

"Then had I better run the risk of a drubbing from thy hands than hazard a worse punishment from one who happens to be thy rival in the lady's love."

"A rival!" exclaimed the esquire in amazement.

"Aye, marry!" answered the dwarf;—"speak I not plainly, or must I again tell thee the girl has another lover?"

"Perdition seize him!" exclaimed Gilbert with furious passion;—"but no matter," he continued, checking himself. "perhaps she loves him in return, and, therefore, is my chance of success small indeed."

"The maiden loathes him," replied the man in miniature;—"she avoids him on every occasion that she can, and the poor fellow by this time has found out that his love is hopeless."

"Good!" ejaculated the squire—

"Not so good either, master squire," answered the dwarf, "for he happens to be of a fierce temper, and woe be unto any one who succeeds in gaining the maiden's love."

"And prithee, good Sir Dwarf, to what quality does he belong?"

"He is chief jailor of the Tower," answered the other, "and between ourselves, this same Martin Fetterlock bears not the best of characters for kindness to those who are unfortunate enough to be placed under his charge."

"Does he think then," asked Gilbert, "because he happens to be rejected himself that no one else is to obtain the hand of the fair Sybilla. By heavens I'll try the mettle of this ill mannered knave, and should he ride rusty there may be ways to cure him of his spleen that he little thinks of at present."

"Bah!" exclaimed the dwarf, "you surely would not be mad enough to anger the hound in his own kennel?"

"And why should I spare him?" asked Gilbert; "has he not presumed to breathe his hateful love in the ears of the exquisite creature I saw just now, and shall I not let him see that the girl's heart is less obdurate towards others than towards himself?"

"Beware, how you do so," cried the other, "for there is more danger in the act than you may think. I am no coward, Sir Squire, but I would rather run ten miles than excite the rage of master Martin Fetterlock. In fact, I love the girl passing well myself, but the thought of having to encounter the jailor's rage has served marvellously well to keep my passion within prudent bounds."

"Then love the girl!" exclaimed Gilbert, regarding the little fellow with a contemptuous glance. "Thou pay thy addresses to the girl, whose size scarcely exceeds that of a moderate sized baby!"

And with this our squire burst into so loud and boisterous a peel of laughter, that the dwarf was completely discomfitted thereby. He, however, strutted about like an enraged turkey-cock, and plucking forth his rapier from the scabbard, exhibited some inclination to punish his tormentor on the spot. But at that moment a hoarse voice was heard from the adjacent range of buildings, and directly afterwards, a couple of men, whose gigantic stature somewhat startled Gilbert, rushed forth, the foremost of whom seized hold of the dwarf, and holding him up high above his head seemed to amuse himself with the fierce struggles with which the other endeavoured to release himself from the hands of his bulky antagonist.

"Why Kit, my little man of mettle, what folly art thou driving at now?" he asked as he once more placed the dwarf on *terra firma;* "wouldst thou spit this worthy squire on thy toledo, or is all this vapouring and noise only made to bring thine unworthy carcase into notice?"

"I have been laughed at," answered little Christopher Dumps, "and who is there with the spirit of a man that would not resent the affront? But let that pass now, friend Hugh, for since thou and that other mountain of flesh,—thy brother Peter,—are here, the gallant is safe, and he may laugh at me, and he will, to his heart's content."

"You, pardon, good Sir Dwarf," exclaimed Gilbert, with difficulty restraining his visible machinations;—"I laughed not at yourself, most worthy friend, but when thou saidst thou hast ventured to love the pretty Sybilla, I could not restrain my merriment which was still further increased by seeing thee vapouring about so madly."

"Our little Kit possesses a great and valiant soul," observed the gigantic Hugh, "and few that know him care to put him in a passion. He has, however, marvellously recovered his coolness, and therefore can I trust him near your worship without fear of the consequences."

"What folly was it that put thee upon attacking this worthy gallant?" asked Peter, who, as well as the rest, could scarcely suppress his inclination for a hearty laugh.

"He derided me because I happened to speak of my love for the fair Sybilla," answered Christopher.

"The fact is, my good fellows," exclaimed Gilbert, "that this little fellow introduced himself to my notice while I was looking round to see how I might best discover the maiden, of whom he has just spoke. For his courtesy in answering my questions I give him my best thanks, though he had almost cancelled the obligation by afterwards seeking to provoke me to a breach of the peace; almost, as I may say, in the presence of her Majesty, Queen Jane, whom God long preserve!"

"And has he told all he knows of the maiden?" asked Hugh, the giant.

"Nay, to my thinking, the chief part has been omitted," answered Gilbert, "for though she told me he had already got a lover in the person of one Martin Fetterlock, the jailer, yet has he altogether forgotten to say who her parents are."

"Pardon me, Sir Squire," replied Hugh. "but the fact is, it would take a wiser man than little Kit to tell what has been kept a secret so long."

"Is the damsel an orphan, then?" asked the squire eagerly.

"That is a question which no one can answer with certainty," replied Hugh; "she passes for the daughter of Ralph Dalston and Dame Margaret his wife, yet it is well known that she is the child of some great lady that was imprisoned in this fortress, and who died after giving birth to the poor wench you have just seen. From that time she has been adopted by Master Dalston and his wife, and folks say that they now and then receive a good sum of money from unknown hands for the support of the girl."

"By heaven, this news revives one!" exclaimed Gilbert; "and if you will serve me so that I may obtain an interview with the maiden, my purse shall be at your command."

"In an hour from this time, I can accomplish your wishes," answered the gigantic warder. "By that time the council will be over, and we shall assemble in the Stone Kitchen, where Master Ralph Dalston has his dwelling. Meet me there, and I will answer for it you will have sufficient opportunity to speak whatever nonsense you please to our pretty Sybilla."

"Then take this piece of gold as an earnest of what I will afterwards do for you," exclaimed Gilbert, slipping a coin into the hand of Hugh the giant. "Accept it, my friend, and if your services prove of the importance I expect, you shall receive such further guerdon as your fidelity may merit."

"I am but a rough messenger of love," answered the man-mountain, "so perhaps in such small matters as carrying billets to the lady, you will employ my trusty little friend, Kit. Dumps. He is trustworthy, I can answer for it, and will perform such affairs with secrecy and caution."

"Then let him bring a message from thee when it is time to meet in the Stone Kitchen," exclaimed Gilbert; "and now, as the council is about assembling, I will bid you farewell for the present, trusting that you will not fail to perform your task according to promise."

"Hold, Sir Squire," cried the giant, as the other was turning away to return to the Council-Chamber, "and observe well the advice I am about to give. You have heard from Kit. that you have a rival in the person of Master Martin Fetterlock, the gaoler of this fortress. He is morose and revengeful in disposition, and little would he care what crime he committed against you so that he could but prevent your carrying off the prize he has failed in gaining. Beware of him, I say, for better you meet some wild ferocious beast than this man, if once you have made him your enemy."

Gilbert promised to be upon his guard against the man of whom he had been thus warned, and reminding the dwarf to bring the message, as had been agreed, he slowly turned away meditating upon the adventure in which he was likely to be engaged. That there was some danger in it he felt quite convinced, but your true lover thinks not of peril when a mistress is to be gained; and resolving to possess himself of the prize, he once more returned to the apartment of the Duke of Northumberland, whom he found just ready to proceed to the council which had been summoned in the great hall.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COUNCIL, AND THE OBJECT FOR WHICH IT IS ASSEMBLED; THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND PRESUMES UPON HIS POWER, AND THE RECEPTION HE MEETS WITH IN CONSEQUENCE; THE WORKING OF A SECRET ENEMY SEEMS LIKELY TO PRODUCE IMPORTANT RESULTS.

THE arrangements being by this time completed, the duke, who had been busily employed in reading several state documents, desired Gilbert to follow him, and keep a strict eye upon all the assembled lords, in order to discover whether any treachery was meditated against their young and lovely Sovereign. Upon this instruction being given, they left the apartment together, and having passed through a number of antique passages and chambers, they at length reached the hall, where they found nearly all the nobles assembled, though the queen herself had not yet taken her place upon the throne which had been hastily erected for the occasion. At a glance, Northumberland saw the dislike with which he was eyed by the majority of the peers, but little regarding this circumstance, he made his way across to the place where the Duke of Suffolk, the Lady Jane's father was standing, and with whom he entered into an earnest conversation upon the affairs they had in hand, and the measures they should adopt to carry them to a successful termination in case they encountered much opposition from the lords who supported the rights of the Princess Mary.

Among those who regarded this scene with the greatest dislike, were Simon Renard and the Earl of Pembroke, both of whom were talking when Northumberland entered, and who only left off to glance upon him a look of hatred and defiance as he passed by them on his way across the hall. But the last-named nobleman regarded them not; in fact, his eyes no sooner met theirs than they were turned away in an opposite direction, and pursuing his way towards the Duke of Suffolk, he quickly forgot the threatening looks of his foes in the important business which just then engaged his attention.

"His Grace of Northumberland seems disturbed," whispered Renard to the Earl of Pembroke. "He already repents the step he has taken, and it shall be no fault of mine if his ruin follows not suddenly upon this exaltation of his daughter-in-law to the throne which belongs to the late king's sister."

"He shall perish in his own toils," returned the earl in the same low tones; "he has brought us hither, we understand, to swear allegiance to the Lady Jane, but rather would I wear out the remainder of my days in one of the gloomiest dungeons of this ancient pile than support one whom I can never regard in any other light than as a usurper."

"We are prepared to avert the evil," answered Renard, "and with heaven's help we shall not fail in the accomplishment of our design. France and Spain are ready to assist the loyal English in their support of Mary, and the miserable faction that has raised this girl to the throne, shall perish for the treason they have dared to hatch against their sovereign."

"Monsieur Renard must have a poor opinion of us islanders if he thinks we need the assistance of France and Spain to carry on a just cause," exclaimed Pembroke haughtily. "The nobles and commonalty of England have often struggled successfully for the preservation of their liberties, and it is to be hoped they are not so far degenerated in these as to require foreign aid in fighting their own battles."

"Pardon me, my lord," cried the wily Spaniard,, "but such was not my meaning; I would merely assure you of the approval your good cause has met with from two powerful allies, and to assure you that there was no fear of having them as enemies should a civil war be the consequence of the ill-advised measures that have thus distracted the nation."

"Let us hope there will be no bloodshed, Monsieur Renard," returned the Earl. "Indeed, I feel assured there will be none, for the people seem to receive the Lady Jane with apathy, and as we passed along today, I could hear many in the crowd express their wishes that the late King Edward's lawful heir had been abroad to receive the homage of her people."

"Then will their wishes soon be fulfilled," answered Renard, "for the Princess Mary is now preparing to set forward to London in order to ascertain what chance she has against her rival. Northumberland, I can see, already, half repents the step he has taken, and if I am not wrong in my calculations, he will either abandon the project altogether, or by adopting some strong measures, still further incense the people against him and the cause he has set on foot."

"Even at this moment," said Pembroke, "I can perceive by his flushed cheek and quickly-glancing eye that he is uncertain how to proceed in this business. Suffolk also seems incapable of giving him advice, and together they will soon be glad to give up the traitorous object they have had in view."

"Perhaps they suspect the plot that is hatching against them," observed Renard, in an almost inaudible whisper. "They have seen before this, that the great mass of the people are against them, and from bitter experience that the nobles of the land are ready to sacrifice their lives in behalf of the princess. 'Fore heaven, my lord, they have made work enough for themselves, and dearly will they repent it 'ere they are many hours older!"

"And yet, with all our boasted strength we have suffered ourselves to be brought hither in the train of Lady Jane," answered the other.

"True," returned Renard, "but if we had not done so we should have betrayed our own cause, and thus have given the haughty duke an advantage which at this moment he does not possess. He now meets us in the Tower of London as if he was a prince to whom homage should be done, but let him beware, for ere many hours have passed he will be a prisoner, and we shall have his destiny,—whether it be for life or death,—in our hands. But hush, the Lady Jane approaches, and we must dissemble, lest the watchful eyes of our enemies detect aught that may lead to our destruction."

As he spoke, a loud flourish of trumpets was heard,—the door of the hall was thrown open, and Queen Jane, accompanied by her friends, approached from an ante-chamber. At this moment, the Dukes of Northumberland and Suffolk advanced to meet her, and in that state she was conducted to the throne, which, it was evident to all, she ascended with fear and trepidation. A few words, however, whispered by Northumberland, seemed to recall her firmness, and curtseying to the assembled lords she took the elevated seat that had been prepared for her reception.

When the preliminary arrangements were made, the duke took a paper from the table, and addressing himself to the noble assemblage before him, he said, with marked emphasis:—

"My lords, you have been collected together to day in order to give your countenance and support to the illustrious female who now occupies the throne of these realms. As Englishmen, your loyalty is to be depended on, and her majesty begs me to assure you of the confidence she reposes in your honour and fidelity,"

Upon this a faint cheer was raised by the few friends who were scattered about the hall, but the majority maintained a stern and ominous silence that was not unnoticed by the Duke of Northumberland. Prudence, however, restrained his rising impatience, and when silence was restored he continued :—

"I should have thought, my lords, that when it was known how anxiously his late revered majesty wished the succession to fall on the Lady Jane Gray, that it would have been sufficient to prevent the pretensions of the Princess Mary; who, it seems, is endeavouring to rouse her friends and adherents to levy war against your rightful sovereign. I have a letter here, my lords, by which it appears that ill advised princess is endeavouring to raise sedition in the land for the purpose of laying claim to a throne from which she has been perpetually excluded. She has written to most of the nobility, requiring them to take the oath of allegiance to her, and desiring them to take immediate steps for having her proclaimed Queen of England at the usual places in and about London. These are her demands, my lords, and relying upon your loyalty to the sovereign who now sits upon her throne before you, I now ask how we shall reply to the treason she has dared address to you."

"Their lordships will not answer at present," replied Sir William Cecil, "for, seeing that the title is a disputed one, they would rather hear your arguments in favour of the Lady Jane before they decide upon what course to persue."

"Alas, my lords !" cried the Queen, "you little know how gladly I would lay down the crown I have been induced to accept if it should appear to be your will that I should do so."

"Her Majesty is timid in finding herself in so great and noble assemblage as this," exclaimed Northumberland, biting his lip with rage. "She loves her faithful subjects, and being fond of privacy and seclusion would retire from a contest for the crown rather than bring trouble into the land by maintaining her own just rights But there are reasons why she should maintain the possession of the throne for which she is in every way so admirably qualified. The support of the Protestant religion depends upon it, and the lives of all who have taken part with the Lady Jane rests upon the security with which we fence in and protect her from machinations of her enemies."

"And are those the only reasons you can urge for depriving the Princess Mary of her rights?" demanded the Earl of Pembroke.

"Ho, my lord! dare you give utterance to your treason here?" demanded Northumberland fiercely.

"If treason consists in speaking one's mind honestly, then am I indeed guilty of it," answered Pembroke, returning the haughty glance of Northumberland. But we will not bandy words in presence of Lady Jane Gray, who, as a victim to the arts of others, is deserving of our pity rather than our anger."

"Suffer me to retire, my lords," cried the Queen, rising with terror from her seat;—"anger and discord are breeding among you, and I will therefore quit a scene which I dread to look upon."

"Your Majesty will pardon me for requesting you to remain with us yet a short time longer," exclaimed the duke, taking her hand and gently leading her back to her seat. "These rebels must be taught the duty they owe to your grace, and to that end I will explain to them the right by which you claim to hold possession of the throne. My lords, you well know that on his divorce from Catherine of Arragon, his Majesty, King Henry the Eighth, declared, with the consent of Parliament, the Princess Mary illegitimate. By that act she is rendered incapable of succeeding to the crown, and all who would now aid and support her pretensions are guilty of treason towards her Majesty Queen Jane, whom heaven long preserve."

"Perhaps," said the crafty Sir William Cecil, "your grace will permit me to ask how the succession can by any possibility be claimed for the Lady Jane whose relationship to the late reigning family was so distant."

"We claim by the power of the sword, and so will maintain it," replied Northumberland. "Nay, more, the late king foreseeing the evil of contension wisely devised, in the presence of many nobles, his rights to his cousin, the Lady Jane. Here, my lords, is the parchments which bears the royal signature, and the names of the witnesses will, I presume, prove a sufficient warrant that the act was done voluntarily and without constraint. It therefore becomes a duty to swear allegiance to our Sovereign Lady, Queen Jane, and my request is that you, my lords, will heal all dissentions by immediately signing this paper."

"We must first have time to consult among ourselves," exclaimed numerous voices from different parts of the hall.

"Nay, not a single instant must be wasted in idle parley," returned the Duke firmly. "The Princess Mary must learn the utter hoplessness of her cause before many hours have elapsed, and in anticipation of your acquiescence I have ordered a horseman to be in attendance, who now waits to convey this document to the Princess Mary, in order that she may at once see the frustration of her ambitious hopes."

"Are we then to be mere puppets in your hands, my lord?" asked the Earl of Pembroke, "or can you really suppose that we are to be frightened into the commission of an act for which we should afterwards be sorry?"

"Thy traitorous words will cost thee dearly," exclaimed the Duke of Northumberland, with increasing vehemence. "I would bring peace upon the land by the adoption of a mild course, but thou urgest me almost beyond myself. Beware, I say, for as I live this paper *must* and *shall* be signed before this noble assemblage separate. Advance then, my lords, to the table, and by an act of prudence avert the dangers which must otherwise distract our beloved country."

"Let me be the first to set an example," said Archbishop Cranmer, advancing and affixing his signature to the document, after him several other lords who were well known to be favourable to Queen Jane approached and added their names to the declaration by which Mary was to be for ever excluded from the throne. Whilst this was passing, Northumberland gazed round upon the assembled multitude, but the firmness of his opponents seemed to be unshaken, and that moment of doubt he resolved upon the hazardous expedient by which he afterwards carried his point to a successful termination. At last, when no others advanced to the table to add their signatures, he and the Duke of Suffolk put theirs, and then a terrible pause ensued, during which the duke could ill suppress the rapidly increasing passion that swelled within his heart. In the midst of this silence, however, his voice was again heard, and addresing himself to several of the peers in rapid succession, he demanded of each in turn whether he refused to execute a task that was intended for the general welfare. But no answer returned, and Simon Renard taking advantage of the silence, whispered to De Noailles, who happened to be standing near him:—

"His Grace of Northumberland will overact his part if he goes on much longer in this mad strain. Their lordships are not to be terror-beaten by this ambitious man. I much doubt whether he will get another signature to the parchment that is to secure the throne of Lady Jane.

"I for one will refuse to do his bidding," said the Earl of Pembroke, who happened to have overheard the Spanish Ambassador

"And yet the duke is not a man to be thwarted when once he has resolved upon anything," observed De Noailles in a low tone. "He has always got his expedient at hand, and take my word, he has not come here unprepared to obtain that by force which he may fail in gaining by peaceful means."

"We will try our strength with him at any rate," answered Pembroke; "in numbers we are far his superiors, and surely he will not dare to coerce those who may afterwards have an opportunity of making him bitterly curse the folly that has brought him this length. What say you Monsieur Renard—think you the crafty duke will venture to urge us to open rebellion against his will?"

"Northumberland has a bold and wayward spirit of his own," replied the wily Spaniard, "and, in my opinion, he will not hesitate to take any step however hazardous it may be to himself. He plays a bold game and will not lose it for want of courage, or rather, as I may say, for want of audacity.

"Hush!" whispered De Noailles, "we must speak lower, or his grace will not long want a sufficient reason to make us all three prisoners in this gloomy place. See, my Lord of Pembroke, how his lip quivers with rage, as he glances around upon those who are not willing to be his tools in this affair of his! By the Holy Virgin a storm is brewing, and woe be unto them who refuse to sign their names to his paper."

It was indeed pretty evident that Northumberland could no longer carry on the assumed humility he had maintained:—his body rocked to and fro with the conflicting tempest that raged within his breast, and dashing his clenched fist violently upon the table, he exclaimed in a voice of thunder:—

"Ho, my lords, are you all struck dumb, or is your loyalty so far pledged to the Princess Mary that you would risk your lives rather than swear allegiance to your rightful Sovereign, Queen Jane?"

But still all remained silent, and many of the peers even turned their backs upon him in token of the utter contempt with which they regarded the extraordinary powers he had thus taken upon himself."

"What! are ye still silent?" he cried furiously; "do you still remain obstinately bent upon your own destruction? But let it be so, my lords—you have yourselves to blame for anything that follows, and I, therefore, once more caution you to beware how you beard the lion in his den."

"Has my Lord of Northumberland taken upon himself the office and dignity of king, that he dares speak thus to those who are at least his equal?" asked Sir William Cecil with bitter emphasis.

"Traitor!" exclaimed the enraged duke, "do you speak thus to one who has the power to raise thee to honour, or consign thee to a dishonoured death? That I have not assumed the royal authority is plain, else should I not have thus entreated you to support her who sits enthroned on my right hand. But this," he continued in a milder tone, "is a mere waste of time and words;—I am here to convince by reason, not to intimidate by force; you have heard, my lords, the letter of the Princess Mary read, and all of you are aware that a civil war must rage in these fair dominions, unless, like true men and faithful subjects, you consent to acknowledge her who has been named his successor by your late king. What say you, my noble Lord of Shrewsbury—will you be the next to add your name to this answer, which I am about to send back to the Lady Mary?"

"Ha!" exclaimed the duke, fiercely, "are you too implicated in the treason that has infected these mad nobles? But it matters not," he continued, glancing round upon the armed soldiers who guarded the hall in every part—"there are ways to humble even the fiercest spirits, and it shall be no fault of mine if, after all, the triumph is not equal to my expectations."

"My lord!—my lord!" cried Jane, stooping forward and speaking in a tone intended only to reach Northumberland's ears, "your speech is too intemperate. You will drive my enemies to desparation, and our own fate will be precipitated by this rashness of language."

"Your Majesty will pardon me," replied the duke, "but I know what we have to depend on if matters are driven to extremity. These soldiers are faithful to us, and a word from me will be sufficient to let these rebellious lords know that we are not to be trifled with in the hour of need." Then, addressing himself sternly to Cecil, he said:—"You appear, Sir William, to place yourself at the head of this faction, but I warn you that the consequences may be more serious than you anticipate, and therefore do I now ask whether you will be the next to sign the paper?"

"I will not," replied the statesman firmly, "and that, I believe, is the resolution of all who surround me."

"It is!" exclaimed a hundred voices.

"Then," cried Northumberland wrathfully, "shall ye never leave this place till ye have yielded to my will. Soldiers—guard the doors, and suffer no one to leave this place till you have further orders. You see, my lords," he continued, "that there is a power to compel the refractory; I am prepared to meet treason with force of arms, and ye shall taste the bitter fruit of your contumacy, unless instant reparation be made."

"My lord," exclaimed the Earl of Shrewsbury, "I warn you, that act of yours shall be amply avenged; you have made us prisoners when we come hither in all confidence, and the treachery will meet its reward when perhaps it is least expected."

"Threaten me not, but do my bidding," retorted the duke, imperatively.

"And what," asked Cecil, "will be the consequence of our refusal?"

"Death by the axe!" answered the haughty Northumberland. "Aye, my lords, ye start, and stare upon each other with amazement —but as surely as yonder sun now shines upon us, so surely shall my word be fulfilled if this obstinacy continues much longer."

"My lord, this is no place for me," cried Jane, starting up with trepidation. "I will retire with my attendants, and leave a scene that is too terrible for a female to look upon."

"Nay, you must remain with us," answered Northumberland resolutely: "your presence is necessary, and I entreat you to give me countenance in this bold act of mine."

"Aye, 'tis a bold act indeed," exclaimed Lord Guildford Dudley, "and one that I fear will lead to the undoing of our cause."

"Silence, sir!" vociferated the duke, angrily; "your life and mine depend upon the firmness with which we conduct ourselves in this perilous moment. The treason of these proud lords must be punished, and therefore do I command the guards instantly to conduct them to their dungeons, unless my will is complied with."

"Santiago! but his grace seems in earnest," whispered Simon Renard to the French Ambassador. "He has caught these lords in his meshes, and they have no alternative but to obey his imperious commands."

"You say truly," answered De Noailles, "but with all his cunning, his Grace of Northumberland cannot make the friends of the Princess Mary sincere in what his force may compel them to do. The nobles of England may sign their names to his paper, but they will never support the usurper in her throne."

"'Tis a hint worth following," exclaimed Sir William Cecil, who, with several of the disaffected lords had heard the last words of the speaker; "we will sign this document, and afterwards plot together for the overthrow of this upstart duke. He may believe himself secure, but he shall wake from a dream of mad ambition to the certainty of a deserved and ignominious death!"

"Then, you will make one in our conspiracy against this tyrant duke?" whispered Monsieur Renard.

"I will—for his death can alone secure our liberties."

"And do those other lords who hear me, agree to join with us?" asked the Spaniard, glancing round upon those who were the nearest to him.

"We do," was the prompt and instantaneous reply.

At this moment, Northumberland, who had been engaged in earnest conversation with Queen Jane, stepped once more towards the table, and placing the paper before the Earl of Shrewsbury, enquired whether he was now ready to sign it?

"I will do it, my lord," answered the nobleman reluctantly, "but methinks you have made use of rather extraordinary arguments to bring us to your own way of thinking in this weighty matter. However, 'tis in vain now to remonstrate, and therefore have I yielded, though sorely against my will."

Following this example, the whole of the other privy councillors affixed their signatures to the document, and this being done, a general move was made towards the door. But the Duke of Northumberland had not yet brought matters to a conclusion, and addressing himself

to the retiring lords, he said with an exultation that he could not suppress:—

"Nay, my lords, you cannot yet be spared since her majesty may have yet further need of your council and advice. You must remain this night in the Tower, and, by to-morrow we will consider whether you can be safely suffered to depart."

"Ha! are we prisoners then after all!" exclaimed Shrewsbury.

"Nay, that were too harsh a term to use," answered the Duke sarcastically; "ye need not deem yourselves prisoners here, but rather as visitors to the queen's majesty.

"Proud duke, thy life shall answer for this!" cried the Earl of Pembroke in a suppressed tone, intended only for the ears of his friends. But the words were overheard by Gilbert Hemingsley, and he was about to inform his noble master of what he had learnt when the duke, assisting the Lady Jane from the throne, led her from the hall. At this moment the dwarf approached Gilbert, and informed him that his presence was now expected in the Stone Kitchen. Anxious once more to see the fair Sybilla, our squire instantly obeyed the summons, and eagerly following his guide, he soon afterwards was traversing the court-yard that led towards the place where she was to be found.

In a few minutes after the council had broke up, orders were given to all the warders of the Tower not to suffer anybody to pass out until permission to do so was given by the Duke of Northumberland.

CHAPTER V.

AN ADVENTURE IN THE STONE KITCHEN, AND THE EFFECT OF A POLITICAL DISCUSSION UPON THE COMPANY ASSEMBLED THERE. —A FRESH ARRIVAL.—AN EXEMPLIFICATION OF THE DANGERS THAT MAY FALL UPON A MAN WHO VENTURES TO HAVE AN OPINION OF HIS OWN.

At the period to which we allude, a party of artizans and people belonging to the Tower were assembled in the Stone Kitchen, there to regale themselves over a cup of strong ale and hear the news that was flying about in all directions. Various groups were formed in different parts of the room, and sundry uninteresting subjects having been good humouredly discussed, the conversation naturally enough took a turn to the proceedings then pending within the Tower walls. This exciting subject soon effected a very considerable change in the peaceable conduct of the company—angry words arose—recriminations followed, and a scene of confusion arose, which would baffle even the masterly pencil of the inimitable George Cruikshank to depict. At length the prayers and entreaties of Master Ralph Dalston, the host—assisted as they were by those of his shrewish wife, Margaret—induced the belligerent parties to pause in the midst of their mad career, and reflect upon the mischief their riotous conduct was likely to plunge them into.

"Peace, neighbours, peace, I prithee," exclaimed Ralph as soon as he could obtain a hearing; "be orderly, I pray, and do not endanger my poor house and property by these boisterous wranglings! Marry, an this outrageous conduct should reach the ears of our good constable of the Tower, I, with my wife and family may chance to be turned from our house to seek our fortune in some other place where these party feuds and wranglings are less known."

"Aye," continued the termagant wife of the host, "and they shall be less known here, or I'll no the reason of it. Hence, to your homes, roysterers and madmen as ye are, for it were better for yourselves to keep the queen's peace than to be disturbing the quiet of our house after this fashion. Shame upon ye;—that ye, who owe your daily bread to honest industry should seek to ruin us by brawls that may serve to make us houseless wanderers."

"Nay, Master Dalston," exclaimed Stephen the warder, "and you, my good dame, reproach not us, who have only ventured to espouse the part of our rightful Sovereign, Queen Jane, but rather let thy wrath light upon yonder scurvy knaves, whose interested motives, and the gold of traitors, have brought hither against us. Trust me, good hostess, we, who are liege men, and true to our sovereign lady, would not by word or action injure thee or thine."

"Hear him!—hear him!" bellowed forth Harry Smith, the armourer; "hear how scurvily the knave speaks of those who take part with the injured Princess Mary!"

"Aye, aye," shouted a voice from one of a party which was congregated in another part of the kitchen;—"aye, aye, Master Smith, speak boldly, and fear not, for there are those by who will not look coldly on, and see thee put down by yonder boasting varlets;—say thy say, man, and look not to the consequences."

"And if Master Smith does speak as thou wouldst advise, let him look to it!" cried the enraged hostess, snatching from the chimney piece a huge rusty faulchion, which she flourished about with an air of determination that made the belligerents retreat a few paces towards the door;—"let him look to it, I say," she repeated, "for, woman as I am, my arm is yet strong enough to cleave him from shoulder to brisket if he dares defy me."

As she concluded this speech, Smith eyed her with a sullen glance, and then retired to consult with his party at the further end of the room, which being perceived by the amazon, she lowered the point of her sword and then proceeded:—

"Shame on ye all, I again say—for I speak alike to both parties,—who would thus disturb the quiet of our house with these vexatious jealousies and brawls! Know ye not that in an instant we may be beggared, and that on a word being spoken to the constable of the fortress he would drive us hence in sorrow and utter ruin?"

"Aye, neighbours," chimed in her husband, "and there is no saying where our misfortunes would find an end, for should the constable think proper to eject us from our home, he may at the same time procure for us a more permanent asylum in one of the numerous dungeons that abound in this place!"

Whilst Ralph Dalston was thus speaking, Stephen, the warder, and Harry Smith, as the leaders of their several parties, were eagerly consulting with their adherents as to what would be the better course to pursue. All now appeared calm, and not a sound was heard, save the low whispers which passed among the company. Taking advantage of the opportunity that offered, one of Smith's party, unperceived by the rest, seized the leaden flaggon from which he had been drinking and hurled it with fearful violence at the head of the unsuspecting Stephen. Fortunately, the blow was not so true as had been intended; it merely grazed his forehead, and then bounding against the wall of the apartment, fell on the floor completely flattened by the terrible violence of the blow. In an instant every dagger was snatched from its scabbard and both parties were rushing furiously towards each other, when they were arrested in the midst of their impetuous wrath by the voice o Stephen.

"Hold!" he exclaimed; "hold, I charge ye, and deluge not this peaceful hearth with blood, for the few drops that some cowardly miscreant has drawn from my brow. I think I could tell from whose hands the missile came, and—"

"Point out the ruffian then," Master Stephen, cried a voice near him—"point him out, I say, and I will venture to drag the villain forth even from the midst of his friends."

"Ah! sayst thou so braggart?" exclaimed Smith contemptuously "marry, thou art more likely to have thy fool's hide picked by my dagger's point, than to pick ere a man from hence while he is under my protection!"

"Hold back your blood hounds, Smith," said Stephen earnestly, and in a low tone only meant for his ears;—"this is no place to settle the differences that are between us, since time and opportunity may be found more fitting than the present. Hold them back, I again say, ere it may be too late."

With a malicious sneer of derision, Smith was about to taunt his adversary with deserting his party on the first appearance of danger, when the door of the apartment was thrown open, and Hugh, the giant, followed by Gilbert Hemingsley and the dwarf, entered the scene of ontention. Silently taking a seat apart from the more noisy guests, our squire beckoned to the host and desired his company to assist in emptying a bottle of canary; a request which the obsequious Ralph most readily complied with. Whilst they were thus seated together, a conversation ensued between them of little general interest, and after having insinuated himself into the good graces of Master Dalston, the squire ventured to enquire the cause of the violent uproar he had just heard. This question was overheard by Smith, who hoping to obtain a convert to his party rose, and advancing towards the other, replied:—

"The quarrel, sir stranger, arose out of a difference of opinion that exists among us as to who is the rightful heir to the throne of these dominions. We who are loyal true men support the Princess Mary, whilst those who are false and traitorous, declare themselves in favour of the Lady Jane, who I maintain to be a usurper, and—"

"Smith, Smith!" interposed Stephen, "why wilt thou again try to raise the angry flame of discord that I had hope was quenched. Queen Jane is no usurper, and I will maintain her rights even to the last drop of blood in my veins."

"Aye, aye," interrupted the trembling host, who plainly foresaw that the quarrel was about to be renewed with more virulence than ever;—"ye may both be wrong,—though pardon me, gentles, I have no doubt ye are both right enough. Much may be said on both sides of the questions, but my opinion is, that if those above us think fit to quarrel, the fairest way is to let them settle the matter by battling it out their own way. What say'st thou to that Master Smith?"

"Say!" exclaimed Smith fiercely, and at the same time seizing the unfortunate host by the throat;—"why, I say that, an' it were not thy worthless carcase is too contemptible even for the hangman's hands, I would have thee gibbeted on thine own sign-post, as a warning to all others who have not the honesty to be loyal to thy rightful queen!"

Terrified at these menaces, Master Ralph Dalston uttered a dismal yell which speedily brought to his assistance the termagant hostess, who rushing towards the assailant, and again brandishing her huge broadsword, exclaimed furiously:—

"Villain! loose your hold upon his throat, or I swear by all the powers of darkness to slay thee where thou standest!"

But the only answers which Smith deigned to make to this threat, was a hearty shake, which he applied with so much rigour that the helpless Ralph Dalston sank exhausted to the ground. Enraged to the highest pitch, that any one besides herself should dare to lay violent hands upon her good old man, the dame strode a step or two nearer to put her deadly threat into execution. The sword was, in fact, raised above her head, and was about to descend with tremendous force upon the person of the unguarded armourer, when Gilbert, now, for the first time, interfering in the quarrel, rushed forward, and seizing her upraised arm arrested the fatal weapon just as it was about to descend.

"Madwoman!" he exclaimed, "what wouldst thou do? Wouldst thou murder him?—He, too, who has entered thy house in confidence and friendly fellowship!—Shame!—shame on thee for thy base attempt!

"Has not the villain slain my husband?" she sobbed, gazing sorrowfully upon the prostrate form of her liege lord and master, and then howling piteously, she added—"Oh Ralph! Ralph! thou wert ever a forward fool in mixing with these quarrelsome knaves and brawling villains."

"Fear not for him, dame," replied Gilbert, "for thou seest he is not so much hurt as frightened at the rough handling he has received. What ho! Master Ralph Dalston," he continued, addressing himself to the host, who had by this time somewhat recovered his severe mauling; "why man, thy wife was just about to perform the part of a sorrowful widow over thy jolly carcase. Come, rouse thee man, rouse thee, and convince her that thou art thyself again."

With a grim look of hatred towards Smith, the host slowly raised himself from the ground, and then looking around him, as if to ascertain what number of friends he might reckon on, he made a sudden spring towards the armourer, and seizing him by the collar of his doublet, called upon those about him for their assistance in securing his prisoner. Taken thus at a moment, Smith seemed at first as if his limbs were paralyzed, but quickly recovering, he, with one blow disengaged himself from the grasp of his adversary, who once more lay gasping at his feet.

This action, momentary as it was, seemed decisive, and the adherents of both parties simultaneously arose and rushed forward with vengeance glaring in their eyes. Again their poniards were drawn, and a few passes were made, when Gilbert Hemingsley perceiving the danger that threatened, rushed unhesitatingly into the midst of the throng.

"Hear me, madmen that ye are!" he exclaimed, "and pause ere ye venture to shed each other's blood, or, by the heaven above us, I swear to lay him a bleeding corse at my feet who shall dare to strike the first blow."

Awed into submission by his words, and the resoluteness of his manner, the contending parties withdrew from each other a few paces, when Smith, who could no longer suppress his rage, exclaimed fiercely:

"And who art thou, sir Stranger, who thus singly venturest to brave the wrath of so many? Thou hast seen me violently assaulted by yonder sprawling caitiff, and now I am threatened by the daggers of some score or two of his friends. Leave us then, to settle the feud in our own way." And then turning round to his own party, he continued, "Comrades, let us avenge the wrongs we have received; seize all who are not for us in the name of Queen Mary, as traitors and foul rebels to their lawful sovereign!"

Following the command of him who acted as their leader, his rabble instantly commenced their attack on Stephen's party, and in a moment all was wild confusion and uproar. Gilbert could no longer control his rage, but dashing impetuously forward, he seized upon Smith, exclaiming:

"Dog! did I not warn thee against this act of frenzy, and yet thou still persistest in setting on yonder miscreants. Surrender to me, or thou shalt die upon the instant! Surrender, I say!"

"Never!" cried Smith, struggling in vain to disengage himself from the iron grasp of his adversary. "Why should I surrender to thee? Who and what art thou, that has thus dared to interfere between me and my just revenge?"

"Who I am," replied the other resolutely, "can matter but little to thee. The authority by which I act, is that which permits every man to protect the weak against the petty tyranny of the strong. Therefore, I say to thee once more, and for the last time—surrender!"

'I will not!" roared Smith hoarsely, and well nigh bursting with rage; at the same time he strove fiercely to disengage himself from the grasp of his adversary, who, knowing the imminent danger that would follow upon his release, clutched him so firmly by the throat that the unfortunate armourer soon sunk exhausted to the floor. Gilbert, whose rage had hitherto been uncontrollable, now imagined that his hands had been guilty of murder, and gazing round upon those about him, he said wildly :

" Thy end has been accomplished! But ye are all witnesses that he would not yield to my repeated commands."

As he said this he knelt down by the prostrate body of Smith, in order to see whether anything might yet be done for his recovery.

Alarmed at the fate of the chief actor in these proceedings, both parties stood gazing upon each other in stupid astonishment. At length, some of those who had espoused the cause of the fallen man, began to consult together, and it was soon evident that they intended to lay violent hands on the squire, who had thus summarily punished their ill-fated companion. Foreseeing this, Stephen approached Gilbert, and recommended him to make the best of his way out of the place, as, if he continued there, the utmost danger awaited him from those who were arrayed against him. But the young man was deaf to these entreaties :

" No," he exclaimed resolutely, " be the consequences what they may, I will fearlessly await the result."

Whilst he was thus speaking, some of the adherents of Smith advanced towards Gilbert Hemingsley, as if with the intention of securing him, but Stephen foreseeing their design, brought a party of his own friends between the squire and his opponents.

" My good friends," he exclaimed, " ye already see the fatal effects that have resulted from these mad feuds. Ye seem resolved to avenge the just punishment inflicted on yonder unfortunate man, as if he was the only victim of this unhappy affray. But ye forget that poor Ralph Dalston is also a sufferer in this day's broil. Retire, then, my friends, and rather than seek for vengeance at a moment like this, carry your comrade to a surgeon, and have him tended to, for I'll answer for it, with a very little care, he will soon recover the slight injuries he has received.

Following this piece of advice, they raised Smith from the ground, and having somewhat roused him from the sort of stupor in which he had been lying, and endeavoured to prevail upon him to leave the place with them. But the armourer was still brooding on revenge, and it was not without considerable difficulty that they at last succeeded in forcing him from the place.

By this time Ralph Dalston had also recovered from the effect of the ill-treatment he had received, and he was just swallowing a posset, which had been prepared by the hands of his wife, when a great uproar was heard on the outside of the Stone Kitchen, and almost immediately afterwards three or four soldiers entered the place, dragging with them a young man, whose appearance shewed pretty plainly that he had been subjected to no very gentle treatment on his passage thither. Gilbert gazed hard at him, for he fancied he had seen him before, and after a few moments' consideration he recognized him as the son of the old woman who had interrupted the procession in the morning, and whose predictions of evil had filled so many of the royal party with apprehensions of evil. That he had been punished with the greatest severity was certain, from the blood that was still pouring from a wound in his head, and the fragments of clothes that were hanging in tatters about his person. Gilbert remembered the orders that had been given by Queen Jane for his being set at liberty, and wondering what all this violence could mean, he inquired by whose orders they had ill-treated the man after the orders they had received from her majesty.

"Don't interfere in matters that don't concern you," answered one of the soldiers sulkily. "The fellow has richly deserved his punishment, and he may think himself well off that we have spared his life on any terms."

"What crime has he committed?" demanded Gilbert.

"Nothing short of high treason," answered the man who had before spoken. "He has been trying to excite the people against Queen Jane, and we found him haranguing a mob of scurvy knaves like himself, who were tossing their caps in the air and shouting out in favour of her majesty's rival."

"This is a grave offence, and thou hast been punished for it according to thy deserts," said Gilbert. addressing himself to the unfortunate fellow who stood gazing upon him with a fixed look of defiance and scorn: "the enemies of Queen Jane must be strictly watched, and whenever we find them endeavouring to excite the public mind against her, it becomes a duty to bring the offenders to a well merited punishment."

"The Lady Jane is no Queen of mine," answered Richard Caleroft, resolutely; "I owe her no fealty, and whilst I live my voice shall be raised in behalf of her who has been foully deprived of her rightful possessions."

"But if thou hast not a care, my friend," exclaimed the squire, "you will be very likely to fall a sacrifice to your own disloyalty. I would, therefore, have thee beware; for our gracious queen has many friends as well as enemies, and those who are against her will only hazard their lives without in the least serving the cause of one who has been justly expelled the throne of this country."

"But I happen to know," returned Richard Calcroft, "that the cause of Mary Tudor is not quite so far lost as you seem to expect. She has powerful adherents, and at this very time a plot is in progress to——"

"Beware!" exclaimed a voice from the further end of the room, with startling solemnity.

"I am warned in time," said Richard, looking round to discover who the speaker was; but his search was in vain; for among all the crowd that was gathered together in the Stone Kitchen, there was not one upon whom his eye could safely rest as the person who had pronounced the single word of admonition. Gilbert also turned his gaze anxiously round the room, but he could not detect the conspirator, and then addressing himself once more to the prisoner, he said—

"It seems, fellow, that some of the queen's enemies are even now lurking within the precincts of the Tower. Knowest thou from whom the warning came?"

"I do not," answered Richard, "and even if I did know, I could not point him out to those who would treat him with the same cruelty I have myself endured."

"Well, thou art perhaps right," exclaimed Gilbert, after a moment's reflection. "The knave would most likely lose his ears as thou hast, and therefore shall he escape this time, in order that he may think better of the mad project he has involved himself in. However, thy wounds must be looked to, for the blood still flows from them to the imminent peril of thy life, and perhaps if thou art spared, the queen may have one more faithful subject willing to devote himself to her cause."

"If you mean Queen Mary, I am already her sworn soldier," returned the other; "I have vowed to live or die under her sway, and, by heaven! to none other will I ever yield my loyalty."

But Gilbert Hemingsley heard not this; for he had hastened across the room to where Dame Margaret Dalston was sitting, and into whose hand he slipped a small piece of money, with a request that she would instantly seek those remedies which the wounded prisoner so much needed. Nor, to do her justice, was the good dame backward in the performance of this really necessary task; for no sooner was the application made, than she bustled towards the place where Richard Calcraft was sitting, and bestowed upon him that attention and skill which his case required. This done, she had him conducted to another chamber, where he was put to bed, though not without the precaution of setting a guard over him to prevent his escape from the Tower.

This done, Gilbert Hemingsley looked anxiously about to see whether the fair Sybilla was any where in the room; but though his searching glance was directed to every part of the place, yet did he fail to discover her among the crowd of visitors, which, by this time, was considerable. In this predicament, he would have applied to his gigantic friend, Hugh, but that worthy was surrounded by a number of persons who were eagerly listening to the merry tales and conceits with which he was entertaining them. It was in vain that he tried to force his way through the throng; the barrier was impregnable, and he was compelled to return to his seat until a more favourable opportunity should offer for the accomplishment of his design. But his patience was doomed to be still further tried; for fresh flaggons of wine were ordered, and when these were placed before them, the hoarse voice of he giant was heard trolling forth the following words:—

Here's success to the clustering vine,
  The source of our solace and mirth;
The rich fount of inspiring wine,
  And the best of man's friends upon earth
Then fill round your glasses and give three huzzas,
To the plant that gives joy and content to our days.

"Bravo! bravo!" exclaimed a score or two of voices, and then followed such a clattering of wine cups on the table, that every other sound was lost in the noise with which the song of Master Hugh, the giant, was hailed. At length, however, something like order was restored, and when the drinking vessels were again filled, our squire made one more effort to gain the place where his colossal friend was seated in the midst of his roystering comrades. But, fortunately for his patience, this was rendered unnecessary by the entrance of Sybilla, who at that moment glided into the room and took her seat in the chimney corner, where she was soon occupied at the spinning-wheel, which had been forsaken by Dame Margaret, at the instant when the affray commenced between the rival factions. Gilbert approached, and would fain have spoken to her; but she kept her eyes intently fixed upon the work before her, and though he several times essayed to address himself to her, yet on such occasion his tongue faltered, and he felt that a spell was upon him which he could not just then dissolve."

"Dost thou see yonder youth?" said Hugh, applying his mouth close to the ear of the person that sat next to him. "'Fore George, he seems stricken with her charms, and would speak to her if he could only find the courage to do so."

"Well, well, youth is bashful," replied the other, "and this young

gallant only follows in the wake of others. Besides, who is there that does not acknowledge the beauty of Sybilla, who seems to have been sent among us by heaven to show an example that we should all do well to follow."

"Now, by St. Paul!" exclaimed the giant, "but I would give the best rose-noble ever coined to know something more of yonder wench's history. That she is high-born, we are all of us certain; but a mystery hangs over her parentage that I should much like to see cleared up."

"And what is it to us?" asked the other; "perhaps it is better that the secret should remain undiscovered, seeing that she is happy enough under the roof of Master Ralph Dalston and his dame,—who, between ourselves, must have a pretty deep insight into the mystery you so much wish to dive into. Besides, you, as well as myself, have, I dare say, heard that she is the daughter of the illustrious ——"

Here the speaker put his head so close to the other, and muttered in so low a tone of voice, that it was impossible for any body to win a single word of what passed between them, Master Hugh, however, seemed to be rather startled, and giving his friend a nudge with his elbow, he whispered—

"Hist, man! be careful what you say, for there are those about who it would be dangerous to trust too far."

"And who is there that we need to fear?" asked the other.

"That's more than I can tell," replied the giant; "but you heard a mysterious voice growl out 'beware!' when the prisoner they just now brought in was about to say more than he ought?"

"I did; but no one seems to know who it was that gave the warning," replied the other. "It might be a joke for aught I know to the contrary."

"It was such a joke," returned the giant, "as may prove dangerous to more than one who are at this time in the Tower of London. I have marked a stranger whose looks are anything but favourable to him, and as he has been watching about the place, I have been making my observations upon his conduct more than he perhaps expects."

"Is he here now?" demanded the other anxiously.

"He is," replied Hugh;—"the person I speak of stands wrapped in his cloak within the shadow of yonder buttress. I can see him even now, for he is looking towards us as if he would dive into our very thoughts."

"Do you know who he is?"

"Aye, marry do I," answered Hugh, "for suspecting that all was not quite right, I have made enquiries about him, and who do you think he turns out to be?"

"The Spanish King, perhaps, who they say is coming over to England for the purpose of helping the Princess Mary to the throne?"

"No," replied the giant, "but it is his Ambassador, Monsieur Simon Renard, who they say has the subtlety of the fox mixed with the cruelty and fierceness of the tiger. He is here for no good purpose depend on it, and by the way he fixes his eyes upon yonder squire, who has not yet done ogling the pretty Sybilla, I should say that some mischief in that quarter is intended."

"To the squire or the maiden?" asked the other.

"Perhaps to both, but most certainly to the young man," answered Hugh. "I have discovered that Gilbert Hemingsley is devotedly attached to his master, the Duke of Northumberland, and as this Spanish envoy has no great partiality for his grace, it naturally follows that he bestows some of his hatred upon so faithful a follower. At all events, I have seen enough within the last quarter of an hour to convince me that the squire is in some danger, and as I feel some friendship for the youth, it would only be doing a kind act to put him on his guard against so vindictive an enemy."

"Take care how you interfere in business that concern s you not!" exclaimed the same mysterious voice that had spoken on a former occasion.

Enraged at this threat, the giant rose from his seat and strode towards the place where he had observed the shadow of the concealed figure, but, to his amazement, the Spaniard was no longer there, nor was he to be seen in any other part of the room. To add to the singularity of the circumstances, the doors were all closed, and there was no way by which he could have made his exit without being discovered by some of the numerous persons who thronged the apartment of Master Ralph Dalston.

"By a lady! but there's some enchantment in this!" exclaimed Hugh, returning to the place where he had left his friend. "I heard the voice of that mischief-plotting Spaniard not a moment since, and yet though I lost no time in seeking him, yet has he managed to whisk the keyhole or some equally small cranny with as much ease as I can drain this flaggon of its contents."

"Which is by no means so difficult a task as it looks," returned the other; "but where art thou off to now, friend Hugh," he continued as the giant was elbowing his way through the crowd that obstructed his passage towards the door. "Hast thou had enough to drink, or is it thy turn to mount guard to-night?"

"Neither the one nor the other is the cause of my leaving thee,'' answered the other, pausing for a moment.'' I go to prevent mischief—the Spaniard means not well towards the squire, and I go to warn the young man of the danger he has to guard against."

So saying, he made his way through the crowd, whispered Gilbert to follow him out of the place as soon as he could do so without being observed, and then quitted the Stone Kitchen to breathe a purer atmosphere in the court-yard without. Presently afterwards, the company began rapidly to disperse, and whilst Ralph Dalston and his dame were busily occupying themselves in clearing away the empty flaggons and cups, our squire took an opportunity to address himself to the fair Sybilla.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PERPLEXITIES OF A LOVER, AND THE CONVERSATION THAT AFTERWARDS TAKES PLACE BETWEEN HIM AND HIS MISTRESS.—CONSPIRACY OF THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR.—GILBERT HEMINGSLEY FALLS THROUGH THE ARTFUL CONTRIVANCES OF HIS ENEMIES.

It was the first time Gilbert Hemingsley had ever been in love, and therefore it is not to be much wondered at, if he felt a little diffident about addressing a young and beauteous female upon so perplexing a subject. He had, as we have already observed, been near her for some time past seeking an opportunity to speak, but somehow or other, when those opportunities did occur, his heart failed the declaration till the next favourable chance offered. It was whilst he was in this perplexity that Hugh, the giant, whispered to him to meet him presently in the court-yard, and to speak the truth, Gilbert was not altogether sorry for an excuse to get away, for he felt the difficulty of his situation, and was, in fact, glad to postpone the task he had undertaken till some future time, when he would have less people about to interrupt and perplex him. At this period, however, he found that the company was quickly thinning, and then waiting till the room was cleared of every one except the host and hostess, who, we have before observed were busily engaged in their domestic affairs,—he again ventured to approach the place where Sybilla was sitting. But the maiden was startled when he stooped to take her hand, and rising from her chair she would have fled from his presence, had he not justly detained her, and at the same time implored her pardon for the boldness he had thus been guilty of.

"Nay, release me, sir,'' she cried, endeavouring to disengage herself from his hands; "let me go I entreat, or there are those close by upon whom I shall call, unless you show me that courtesy which one of my sex usually expects from yours.''

"Pardon me, young lady," replied Gilbert, "for my conduct though abrupt, shall not deserve the name of rudeness. I have much to say, and but brief time to speak it in, so that I am under the necessity of entreating you to give me a meeting this night at twelve under the west wall of the White Tower."

"Nay, you must have but an unfavourable opinion of me, if you expect me to be guilty of so great an imprudence," she replied in a tone of slight reproach. "If the affair you would speak of is of importance, I have friends to whom the communication should be made.''

"And who are they?" asked Gilbert.

"My father and mother," replied the maiden timidly;—"you will find Ralph Dalston and his good dame anxious to pay you whatever courtesy your communication may merit."

"I understood that Master Dalston and his wife were merely your foster parents," observed Gilbert. "Such is the report I have heard, and the story goes on to assert that the apparently humble Sybilla is the daughter of a noble lady whose ancestry ranks amongst the first in the land."

"Alas!" sighed the maiden, "what have I to do with ancestry? I have been brought up in the humble sphere you now see me occupy, and happy as I have been in that situation why should I wish to change it for the glitter and tinsel of a court?"

"True," answered the young squire, "but surely it would afford some gratification to discover the parents whose fate appear to be involved in so much mystery."

"It is the chief object of my anxiety," she replied, "and yet, I almost dread the fate of my poor mother, who, they tell me, met her fate within these dreary walls. I have sought to learn her history, but they tell me it is too sad a one to trust me with 'till I grow older; and thus am I doomed to linger on in uncertainty 'till they chose to relate that which so deeply interests me."

"Give me but permission and I will go heart and soul to the task of unravelling the mystery." Exclaimed Gilbert earnestly.

"Nay," she replied, "you forget that we are strangers;—'till this day we have never met, and this, perhaps, may be the last occasion of our ever seeing each other."

"Not if you will it otherwise," replied the young man with ardour. "It was to entreat your consent to see me now and then that I came hither, and if you refuse the boon I shall go home with heart and hopes blighted."

"Hush!" she said, "or my kind guardians will overhear you, and forbid your future visits to this place."

"And would you join them in so cruel and interdict?" asked Gilbert, with feverish anxiety: "would the gentle Sybilla occasion pain, when with a single word she could excite so much hope and gratitude?"

"Your question is one that I dare not, in prudence, answer," she replied after a moment's hesitation. "Remember we are strangers to each other, and it hardly can be expected that I would confess so much, even though I might feel some sorrow at your being forbidden the house on my account."

"Then will I believe all for the best," exclaimed Gilbert, seizing her hand, and pressing it to his lips, though, not without some resistance on the part of the blushing girl. But this action, momentary as it was, had been observed by Dame Dalstone, who, approaching our young squire, rated him in pretty round term for his presumption, and then desired him to quit the place, with a further intimation that his future visits could be dispensed with. Of course, there was no appeal against this command, but by dexterously slipping his purse into the hands of the old dame, he so far softened her indignation as to raise a smile upon her rigid countenance, while she lighted him towards the door that led from her dwelling place.

Whilst these events were going on in the Stone Kitchen, two persons were engaged in the court-yard in deep and earnest conversation. One of them was Monsieur Simon Renard, and the other the Earl of Shrewsbury, an equally active agent in the conspiracy that was then hatching against the life of Queen Jane, and all were engaged in supporting the cause. At present, however, their object was to carry destruction upon Gilbert Hemingsley, who, for some reason or other, they believed to be more in their way than any of the others who they had vowed to destroy.

"But are you sure the youth has not left the place ere this?" asked Shrewsbury, first breaking silence after a long pause, during which they had been watching the door from which it was expected their victim would make his appearance.

"I am certain of it," answered the Spaniard?—"I saw him there myself not an hour since, and should have remained to watch him from the place had I not been obliged to make a hasty retreat rather than fall into the hands of Hugh, the gigantic warder. From that time I have not quitted the place, nor shall I do so till we have him securely in our power."

"But why is your anger more excited against him than against foes of more consideration?" asked the Earl of Shrewsbury.

"Because he is too faithful to his master, the Duke of Northumberland," answered the Spanish Ambassador. "The youth has ever got his eye upon us, and I know full well that it is to him we owe this mischief that has befallen us, through his grace learning the progress of our plot before it was half matured."

"Hah!" exclaimed the Earl, "then I no longer wonder at the anxiety you have manifested to get him out of the way. But tell me, I prithee, what is to be done with him?—Is he to be suffered to live or shall we hurry our poniards in his heart, and then escape in the confusion that will be sure to follow?"

"Whatever we do must be attempted with the greatest caution," returned Monsieur Renard, "the least failure on our part may lead to the entire frustration of the plans which we have in progress for the raising of Mary to the throne of England, and therefore, do I council you to proceed in this matter as in one that affects your life or death."

"But what is to become of this youth?" asked Shrewsbury.

"He must be rendered insensible," answered the Spaniard, "and in that condition we can carry him whithersoever we please without fear of interruption. I have friends here at hand who are already aware of the task they have to perform, and who, even in the event of a discovery taking place, would suffer any tortures our enemies can inflict, rather than confess who it was that employed them in the task."

"Good," exclaimed the Earl of Shrewsbury; "*we*, then, at least, shall be safe, and if blood should be spilt on our side it will only be that of base plebeians who we have well paid to run the risk their avarice tempts them to join us. Let them perish by thousands if they will, England has enough to spare if events should happen to take an unlucky turn against us. But see, some one approaches,—perhaps it is a spy,—let us speak him fairly and put him upon a wrong scent in case he should be sent hither to watch our actions."

"Good morning to you, friend," said Monsieur Renard as the man approached, and then regarding him suspiciously, he demanded who he was.

"Martin Fetterlock," was the reply.

"Your trade?"

"Chief turnkey of this fortress."

"Humph!" cried Renard;—"a good trade enough for troublesome times like these. Hast thou many prisoners under thy charge?"

"Aye, marry have I," answered Fetterlock, "for more than half of those who came to day in the suite of Queen Jane are now under my custody, till I receive further orders from his Grace of Northumberland."

"True," muttered the Spaniard, moodily, "I had forgotten the nobles that were committed to your safe keeping. Methinks their lordships are under an obligation to his grace, which they will not be likely to forget in a hurry."

"Hark!" interposed the Earl of Shrewsbury, twitching the cloak of his companion;—you forget the prudence you just now spoke of, and if these words should be reported the chances are, that instead of enjoying thus much of liberty, we shall presently find ourselves, somewhat more closely confined, within one of the dungeons, belonging to this fortress."

"Your counsel is well timed, and accepted, "answered Monsieur Renard," though something strikes me that this knave is not so much our enemy as you imagine."

"I am no enemy of yours at any rate, " exclaimed the turnkey, who had, without being observed, approached near enough to overhear the latter words; " nor, am I a knave, though the ill treatment of some almost drives me to commit an act of vengeance upon those who have wronged me."

"Indeed!" returned Monsieur Renard,—" and who, I prithee, has had the hardihood to offend one that, at some future time, may happen to hold him under the custody of a lock and key?"

"There are two of them," answered the jailor;—"the pretty Mistress Sybilla is one, and the other is a pert, upstart coxcomb, who has dared to court her smiles."

"Who! I see,—this is some love affair," exclaimed the Earl of Shrewsbury, smiling as he made the discovery. "You are her lover, and yet she encourages the advances of another?

"Aye" answered Fetterlock, " women like, she is fickle as the wind that blows, and when most I thought myself secure, she rejects me with scorn, to bestow her love upon a stripling who has only entered the Tower this day in the retinue of the Queen."

"Indeed!" answered Fetterlock, "indeed" cried the Spaniard, " then should I say her faithlessness was scarcely worth regetting, seeing that the youth has not been here many hours, ere her her heart was lost to him. But perhaps they have seen each other before, and—"

"Nay, that I can swear they have not," interrupted the gaoler; "never before this morning did they meet, and yet has he contrived to make himself so agreeable to her that I much question whether I have any longer a chance of prevailing on her to be mine."

"Pardon me, friend," exclaimed the Earl of Shrewsbury, "but knowing, as I do, something of the human heart, I should say she never could have loved yon, else had she never have encouraged the advances of a rival."

"You do not believe in witchcraft then?" said Fetterlock, regarding the last speaker with surprise. "There has been foul play practised by this young fellow, or never would Sybilla have proved so false as she has."

"Know you the name of the youth?" asked Reynard.

"Gilbert Hemingsley," answered the turnkey.

"Hah!" ejaculated the Spaniard;—"you mean the squire of his Grace of Northumberland?

"I do," replied Fetterlock sternly, "but were he the squire of the queen herself, he should not escape the vengeance I have in store for him. He has injured me, and the wrong shall be amply atoned for."

"Why that is excellent," cried Monsieur Renard; "I have myself good reason to hate this youth, and if you think fit to aid me in a plot against him, we may yet teach him the danger of interfering in matters that concern him not. Do you agree to assist me?"

"I do most cheerfully. Is he to die?"

"Humph! that will depend upon circumstances," answered Renard, "We do not wish to steep our hands in his blood if it can be avoided; but he must be placed in your care to be produced whenever we may see see fit to require it."

"He shall be safe enough, I warrant you," exclaimed the turnkey with a grim smile of triumph. This young squire has given me some uneasiness, but it shall be my fault if ever he and the fair Mistress Sybilla meet again."

"Why, that is well said," returned Monsieur Renard; "but see the door of the Stone Kitchen opens, and he we have been speaking of is about to take his departure. Stand aside, good Master Fetterlock, and as your rival passes this way, throw your cloak over his head so as to stifle his cries; and, in that condition, bear him away to the place where you mean to confine him."

No reply was made to this, but ere an instant had elapsed the directions of Renard had been obeyed, and, struggling against the power of his enemies, Gilbert Hemingsley was born away he knew not whither. Once he contrived to release himself for a moment so as to raise a cry for assistance, but a violent blow rendered him insensible, and in that helpless condition he was borne away from the place.

CHAPTER VII.

THE QUEEN AND THE DWARF.—A MIDNIGHT EXCURSION PROPOSED AND THE ADVENTURES THAT BEFEL HER MAJESTY.

After the breaking up of the council, Queen Jane retired to the apartment which had been prepared for her reception, and where, attended only by two or three of her maids of honour, she passed an hour or two in sad reflection upon the precarious state to which she had been elevated so much against her own will. For some time after this, she was suffered to remain in this melancholy abstraction without being disturbed, but at last, Lady Catherine May, her favourite confidante, ventured to approach and divert her attention from these sad thoughts by conversing with her on lighter and more cheerful subjects.

"Your majesty appears to be out of spirits to night," she exclaimed, snatching up a lute that was lying on the table,—"they say music hath charms to dispel the cares of the world, and gladly would I try my poor skill in changing the current of those thoughts that appear to be so clouded with grief.

"Alas! Kate," replied the queen, sorrowfully, "my mind still reverts with regret to what I was ere the ambition of others forced me to accept a throne I never coveted."

"Nay," cried the Lady Catherine, in a tone of forced gaiety, "your highness still persists in looking only at the most gloomy side of the picture. It was the will of the late king that you should be his successor, and the happiness of the people depends upon the exclusion of the Princess Mary from the power you carefully possess."

And yet," sighed the queen, "those very people of whom you speak, regard me only as a usurper."

"Now would I give half that I possess in the world to see you more cheerful," exclaimed the maid of honour; and then passing her fingers over the strings of the instrument she had taken up, she played a lively symphony, in order to try its effects upon the spririts of her royal mistress. "What does your majesty command me to play?" she continued archly, "shall I give you the romance of the 'Knight and the Page,' or will you have the 'righte doleful and chivalrous tragedy of King Hamelin and the Princess Pacquetta?'"

"Nay, Kate," answered the queen; "my mind is ill at rest, and music would but make me the more sad. Let us talk together of happier times that are past, and perhaps by and bye, I shall be able to listen to your sweet tones."

"If your highness would like to seek amusement," cried the Lady Catherine, "there is one not far off who, I think, would seem to divert an hour or so pleasantly enough."

"Mean you the court jester?" asked the queen.

"Nay," answered the other, "but I mean one who is quite as great a wit, though not quite so great a person. In fact, it is a dwarf, who I chanced to see a short time since; and from the singularity of the little creature, I could not help thinking to myself, that if at any time I chanced to be dull, his presence would prove a certain antidote to expel the vapours from one's brain."

"Is he in attendance, Kate?"

"He is now in the adjoining chamber," answered her attendant. "I sent to command his presence, and the the little fellow, whose gallantry is not to be impeached, instantly obeyed my summons, thinking, no doubt, to be involved in a love intrigue with some of the court ladies."

"Kate, Kate, thou art a wilful maiden," exclaimed the queen, smiling in spite of her former melancholy; "but I forgive thee, wench, because that which thou hast done has been suggested by thy never-failing love towards myself."

"Then I may fetch the dwarf hither?"

"Thou may'st," answered the queen; "but see that thou comportest thyself gravely; for though I yield to thee in this matter, it is rather to pass away an hour in forgetfulness of my griefs than to make myself merry at the expense of another."

The Lady Catherine waited for no second bidding, and hastening out of the room, she quickly returned with the dwarf, who, with the strangest antics, approached the lovely but unhappy queen. As Jane perceived this diminutive personage, she could herself scarcely forbear laughing in spite of the oppression that weighed heavily upon her heart; but concealing this inclination as much as possible, she welcomed the little mannikin, and bidding him be seated, enquired how he could best beguile away an hour of grief.

"Would your majesty be pleased to hear me sing?" asked the dwarf, clearing his throat, and preparing to obey a command that he had no doubt would follow his proposition.

"Nay, I am too sad of heart for that," answered the queen; "thy song might remind me of happier times, when the cares of royalty were as yet unthought."

"I have a goodly store of lively ballads which would raise a smile even from the most unhappy," exclaimed Christopher, swelling with his own importance. "Hugh and Peter both praise my vocal abilities, and what they say, is, in this place, the law."

"And prithee who are those men whose opinions carry so much away?" enquired Jane, with a languid smile.

"They are yeomen wardens of this fortress" answered Kit, "and being far above the usual standard of mankind, are perhaps better known as the giants of the Tower."

"And are these giants so affable that they deign to associate with a dwarf?" asked the queen.

"Your majesty is not aware that though somewhat small in stature, I am renowned in feats of arms," replied the little man bowing almost to the ground. "I can use my sword with some skill whenever occasion requires, as your highness should soon be convinced, if any body in my hearing should dare to gainsay your right to the crown of these dominions."

"Nay," returned the queen smiling at his earnest tones, "let not your loyalty, good Sir Knight, outrun your discretion. I have many gallant friends who are sworn to defend me, and, truth to say, I cannot help grieving that they are not devoted to a cause more likely to meet with a successful termination."

"Now your majesty would be sad again," said Christopher. "You look only to evil, when there is a fair prospect of every thing turning out as your most zealous friends could wish. But we will change this subject, if it so pleases your grace, and, now I think of it, there are many curious legends connected with this ancient fortress, the relation of which may serve to pass away an hour or two."

"Perhaps they are too full of horrors to suit me just now," observed

Jane. "I shuddered as I entered its frowning portals, and something seemed to tell me that a heavy doom would be the result of the step I have been prevailed upon to take."

"Why that the legends of this place are not of the most cheerful decription it must be owned, " replied Christopher. "There are many horrors to be told of the victims who have been brought here, and there is one in particular relating to the unfortunate Queen, Ann Boleyn, which I think would interest your highness greatly."

"Not now,—not now, good Sir Dwarf," interrupted the queen shuddering. "Her dreadful fate is too well remembered by me at this moment, and I cannot banish the thoughts that ere long my own fate may be like hers.

"Nay," exclaimed the dwarf, "it was her fate to mount a scaffold, whilst it is yours to ascend a throne. She perished at an early age, but, if I am not much mistaken, you will live long to reign over a happy and contented people."

A heavy sigh was the only response vouchsafed by the unhappy queen, and resting her cheek upon her hand, she remained for some time in a state of mournful abstraction. At'last, however, she was roused from her melancholy, by Lady Catherine May, who approaching her suffering mistress, endeavoured by more cheerful conversation to banish the dark thoughts that flitted through her brain. Somewhat roused by this, Jane raised her head, and having thanked her attendant for the kindness she had meditated, she next addressed herself to Christopher and enquired whether he knew enough of the Tower to conduct her over those parts that were most curious in one historical point of view. At this' question, the little man waxed exceeding consequential, and passing his hand over his chin with much gravity he answered:

"If I may be permitted to flatter myself on one point more than another, it is on the knowledge I possess of all the intricacies belonging to this overgrown place. Perhaps your highness will be good enough to say what part of the Tower it is your pleasure to visit.

"The Chapel of St Peter," answered Jane. after a moment's pause. "It contains memorials, I believe, of several who found a grave as well as a prison in this place, and I would pass an hour in contemplating the fall of those who have become victims by a tyrannic power."

"Aye," returned the dwarf," your grace is in the right of it,—the chapel is full of such memorials, and thither do I often retire to meditate upon the fall ambition is often doomed to experience, and to take a warning, lest I, myself, should at any time be inclined to raise myself above the level in which good dame Fortune has placed me."

"*Thou* climb above thy level!" cried the Lady Catherine May with surprise.—"*Thou*, whose very size is a sufficient barrier to any danger on that score."

"Ah, young maiden!" sighed Kit, "you little know the yearning after immortality that swells within this bosom. My friends,—the two giants, I spoke of before, often declare that I possess the spirit of a man of larger growth, and if you would only allow me to be your squire, the time should never come when you would have to blush for your defender.

"Well answered, on my faith," cried Kate, blushing at the compliment of the valorous Christopher Dumps. Yet, with all thy gallantry, fair Sir Squire, thou hast forgotten that her majesty has desired thee to conduct her to the Chapel of St. Peter."

"I stand reproved, fair maiden," answered the dwarf, "and yet the fault of my forgetfulness lies in those bright eyes of thine. Nay, do not pout, for,—saving her majesty's presence,—I would that thou would'st set me some impossible task in order that I might prove how devoted a servant thou would'st find in the humble being before thee."

"Another time thy gallantry may be proved, good Christopher," cried the laughing maiden, "but methinks thou art sadly forgotten thy much vaunted loyalty, seeing that the queen has been waiting some ten minutes or more for a guide to conduct her to the chapel."

"If I have been oblivious, her grace will, I hope, pardon me," exclaimed the little man, strutting like a bantam cock across the chamber, and opening the door for the queen to pass through. But Jane seemed not quite to have made up her mind whether she would go or not, and after a few moments' reflection she said:—

"It is a melancholy spot to visit at this late hour of the night, and yet a feeling of curiosity prompts me to follow thee to the chapel."

"Your majesty will be amply repaid for the trouble it may occasion," answered Christopher, unwilling to lose the honour of conducting the queen thither, and endeavouring to prevail over her scruples by enumerating some of the things she might expect to see there. "In front of the altar lie the remains of the lovely Anne Boleyn, and her brother, Lord Rochford, whose execution, by the axe, in 1536, I can just remember."

"Here was a sad fate indeed!" replied Jane, "and if I have heard rightly, close beside her are the remains of the more guilty, and therefore the less pitied Catherine Howard."

"Your majesty is quite right," answered the dwarf, delighted at having an opportunity to show off his little stock of knowledge. "The Lady Howard, as you say, rests there, and at no great distance off lies Baron Sudeley, lord high admiral of England, beheaded in 1549, under a warrant from his own brother, the proud Duke of Somerset, who followed him to the scaffold and the grave within three years. But, doubtless, your majesty remembers that the nobleman I last mentioned, was sent to meet his fate upon the block by his present Grace of Northumberland, who——"

"Hold! I implore you, hold!" interrupted the queen eagerly. "The remembrance of that even is yet fresh in my mind, and I would fain forget it as a deed that will ever prove a stain upon the character of the duke you have named."

"I am dumb," cried Christopher, in a tone of evident vexation at having alluded to so disagreeable a topic, "Your majesty will, I hope, pardon me for mentioning——"

"That which you must be careful never to utter again," interrupted the Lady Caroline. "And now, fair Sir Dwarf, your duty is about to commence, her highness, as you see, is ready to depart, and yet there you stand twirling your hat between your hands as if struck silly by the gentle rebuke you have encountered."

"You and my other ladies will remain here till I return," said the queen, addressing herself to the Lady Caroline. "I will remain but a brief time in the chapel, and, having satisfied my curiosity, will return here anon."

"But if the Duke of Northumberland or Lord Guilford Dudley should come to see your majesty?——"

"Say that I have but gone to see a part of the royal fortress, and will be back directly," answered the queen. "And now, my faithful squire," she continued, addressing herself to the dwarf, "I wait only to be conducted to the chapel of St. Peter."

Acting on this hint, Christopher took from the table a lamp, and going before the queen he conducted her through numerous narrow and winding passages towards that part of the building in which the sacred structure is situated. As Jane passed on, she felt the chilling effects of the night air, as it swept through the dark vaults that interposed themselves in the way. But she was resolved that no obstacle should prevent the accomplishment of her design, and wrapping her scarf more closely round her fragile form, she followed her guide until they reached a gloomy chamber, the vast size of which, caused her to pause, in order that she might examine it more closely. Here, by the aid of the dwarf's lamp, she discovered numerous instruments of torture, which had been conveyed thither to remain in obscurity and darkness, until some new victim should be found upon whom it might be considered politic to execute the usual course of fiendish punishment. The queen shrank back aghast, at the sight of these dreadful instruments, and motioning to her guide, she passed quickly onwards in order to shut out the sight of that which had filled her with such painful emotions.

Having at length reached the end of these long, dreary passages, they came to a flight of broken stone steps that led down into a court yard below. These, with some difficulty, they descended, and then crossing the open area they arrived at the door of St. Peter's chapel. Here the dwarf placed his lamp upon the ground, and then climbing up one of the pillars, he found the key which had been secreted there , and with which he soon opened the door of the sacred edifice.

"Here, for a short time, your services will terminate," said the queen taking the lamp from Christopher's hands as soon as she found herself inside the chapel. "I would be alone for the present, so that you can either return to the apartment we have just left, or remain here until I again rejoin you."

"I will remain in the court yard then," answered Christopher, hesitating what to do;—"your highness will find this but a cheerless place, and should any thing occur to cause you alarm, it would be better that I should be near in order that I may fly to your assistance."

"Let it be even as you will," answered the queen, "but on no account enter this place unless I should call upon you to do so. Remember my commands, and upon your loyalty I command you to obey them."

Thus compelled to leave his royal mistress, the dwarf slowly turned away, and at the same moment the queen hastened into the body of the church where her mind was soon absorbed in contemplating the awe-inspiring scene with which she was surrounded. With the assistance of her lamp she soon discovered the various tombs of the illustrious dead, which had been the principal cause of her present visit,—and having perused the brief inscriptions upon them, she next turned her attention to several others that were placed against the walls. One of them in particular attracted her gaze, in consequence of the great pains that had been taken to decorate it with the arms and ensigns of the person it was intended to commemorate. Among other things with which the marble was surrounded, were the sword and battle-axe of the gallant knight whose inanimate form now lay rotting beneath. Jane sighed as she beheld these emblems of blood and warfare introduced in this holy place, and she was about to turn with horror from the spot, when a sound of footsteps fell upon her startled ear, and at the same moment she fancied she could distinguish the voices of persons whispering to each other at no great distance of. Terrified at this, the queen raised her lamp in order to penetrate the deep gloom with which she was on every side surrounded, and scarcely had she commenced her search, when she beheld leaning against one of the massive pillars, the figure of an aged female, whose form was almost entirely concealed by her capacious cloak. As the light of the lamp fell upon her, she advanced slowly from the pillar, and having reached the place where the queen was standing, she laid her long bony fingers upon the hand of Jane, and in a hollow tone exclaimed :—

"Start not, royal lady, for I am here rather to warn than injure thee. Thou hast enemies on the watch for thee. Beware of them, I say beware!"

"And who art thou that givest me this warning?" cried the queen, stepping back a pace or two, as if dreading some lurking treachery from the mysterious visitor. "Who art thou, I say, and what is the object of thy presence here?"

"Who I am," answered the woman, matters but little; "and the object of my coming here has already been declared. I say to thee, thou art in danger. Beware! beware!"

"Perhaps the danger is from thyself," exclaimed Jane. "But a few moments since I heard footsteps, and the suppressed voices of persons whispering together;—"thou hast go. companions here, and I am betrayed into the hands of assassins."

"Nay, thou judgest of me too harshly," replied the old woman; "I have seen those thou hast just spoken of, and it is of them that I would warn thee."

"Alas!" sighed the queen, "who are the enemies I have to dread?"

"I dare not name them," answered the woman, "because I love the cause in which they are engaged."

"And yet thou hast come hither to warn me against their malevolent designs," returned Jane. "How is it that thou a declared enemy would save the life of one who has been marked out for destruction."

"Yield up the crown thou hast taken, and thy life will be safe," answered the woman, "I would see the Princess Mary upon the throne of England, because she belongs to the religion her forefathers bled and died for. She is a true daughter of the Church of Rome, and her friends are ready to rise and perish in asserting her rights. Say then, wilt thou yield up a crown that has been forced upon thee, and which must bring thee to certain destruction?"

"Leave me!" exclaimed the queen firmly. "This is no subject for us to confer upon here, and I would now return to those I left but a short time since."

"Stay!" cried the old woman, again placing her bony fingers upon the hand of the queen; "thy proud father, the Duke of Northumberland, has, this day, torn away from me my only son, my darling boy, He has been thrown into a dungeon within this ancient fortress, and doubtless, our enemies will slay him for daring to raise his voice in favour of her, who, he believes, has a better right to the throne than thou hast."

"Nay, thy fears outrun thy discretion," answered the queen. "The Duke of Northumberland is ardent in the cause he advocates, but thou wilt not find him so blood-thirsty as thou hast said. Thy son may have been arrested for imprudent words spoken, but his life shall not be endangered, if I have power or authority to save him."

"But there are those who have usurped more power than thou thyself hast," exclaimed the woman. "The Dukes of Northumberland and Suffolk, would trample the people under their feet, and neither of them will hesitate to perform an act of oppression, whilst they can thus lord it over those they pretend to govern."

"Peace! I charge thee, peace!" exclaimed Jane, in a more peremptory tone than she usually assumed: "thou art casting these reproaches upon those who are nearest and dearest to me, and it would ill become me to listen to thy vile charges against men, who,—however mistaken they may be,—are still acting according to their own notion of right."

"Thou hast been warned," cried the woman, "and now, if thou fallest into the snares of thine enemies it will be no fault of mine; beware, I say again, beware, for thy hour of peril is nigh."

At these words the old woman suddenly disappeared, and Jane was about to hasten from the place, when the noise, that had before startled her was repeated, and a voice was distinctly heard to mutter: "It is the Lady Jane!" At this confirmation of her worst fears the queen screamed with terror, and ere she could leave the place, the battle axe, which she had been regarding with so much horror, fell on the pavement, at her feet, with a heavy crash.

The fatal omen was at once understood by the unfortunate queen, and she would have fled from the scene of terror, but at that moment her lamp was blown out by a sudden gust of wind and she thus found herself at the mercy of whatever enemy might have followed her to this lone spot.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW QUEEN JANE ESCAPED FROM THE CHAPEL; AND HER INTERVIEW WITH THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER; THE DWARF AND THE TWO MAIDS OF HONOUR.

Had Queen Jane possessed less nerve she would have called for assistance, knowing as she did that the dwarf was no great distance off. But she remembered that the adventure, if once known, would give rise to many unpleasant rumours, and resolving, if possible, to keep it a secret, she slowly groped her way towards the door to which she had entered the chapel. This, with the assistance of the feeble moonlight, she was able to effect with more ease than she expected, and finding herself once more in the court yard she was making her way towards the stone steps by which she had descended, when little Christopher Dumps came running towards her with all the speed he could muster.

"Pardon me, your majesty," he cried almost out of breath with the exertion he had used," but the way you are going is both dangerous and difficult to tread. It is said to be haunted, too, by evil spirits, and the rogues as I have heard say, have no more respect for royalty than they have for us common folks. But bless me! your grace seems to be all in a flurry! has any thing happened to alarm your majesty? or has one of the ghosts I spoke of dared to—."

"Peace!—I charge you, peace!" interrupted the queen, scarcely yet recovered from the tremor into which she had been thrown by her recent mysterious adventure; "my lamp was extinguished by a sudden gust of wind, and, being terrified, I foolishy fled without exactly knowing why or wherefore."

"Your majesty acted quite wisely," said the dwarf with as much freedom as if he had been talking to an equal; "I like not being in chapels in the dark: one may see more than is exactly pleasant, and—"

"Thou hast observed some one enter then, whilst I was there?" interrupted the queen, as a sudden thought flashed upon her mind. "Speak, who was it that followed my steps thither as if for the purpose of doing me some mortal injury?"

"Ho, ho! your grace acknowledges having been frightened then?" exclaimed the dwarf. "You have heard noises, perhaps, and little wonder, too, considering the reports I have heard of evil spirits that delight in making that place their resort."

"Nay, I have seen nothing superstitious," answered the queen, "though it must be confessed I am somewhat alarmed at the unexpected appearance of an aged female whose conduct denoted her to be a manaic.

"St. George! but this is strange!" cried Christopher, after musing a few moments upon the words he had been listening to; "an old woman, your majesty says? Marry, I know of none in the Tower that will answer the description your majesty has given;—a maniac, too! 'slife! they are dangerous people to meet in so lonely a place as St. Peter's Chapel."

"I know not that her errand was a hostile one," answered Jane; "indeed her manner seemed rather friendly than otherwise, seeing she had sought me out in order to warn me against some dangers with which she fancies I am menaced."

"Ha! now I remember me, there is such a singular being as your majesty has alluded to, within the walls of this fortress," exclaimed the little fellow. "Master Hugh, the giant, who is my especial friend and protector, told me but a short time since, that a beldame called Mabel Calcroft, had got admission here to see her son, who it seems has been arrested for speaking words disrespectful to your majesty and those who have favoured your righteous cause."

"Mabel Calcroft!" cried the queen with an expression of wonder—"aye, aye, I remember now; 'tis she who accosted me this morning as I was about to step into the barge, and who warned me of certain dangers that threatened if—"

"Oh, it's the same to a certainty," interrupted Kit familiarly; "she has been raving about the judgment of heaven that was to fall upon all who were friendly to your majesty, and to such a pitch did she arrive at last, that Master Martin Fetterlock, the head gaoler of the fortress, was going to lock her up in one of his deepest dungeons had she not contrived—"

"Harm her not," cried the queen, anxiously, "she is crazed, and it would ill become us to injure those who are not accountable for the maladies with which they are afflicted."

"May it please your majesty, I was going to observe, that the old woman shewed the advantages of a light pair of heels over the usual sloth of Master Fetterlock."

"She escaped from him then?" cried Jane, anxiously.

'Aye, marry did she," answered the dwarf, "and it would have done your majesty good to have heard how Martin swore as he saw her flying across the quadrangle as if a whole legion of devils had been at her heels."

Jane, in spite of all her grief could scarcely refrain from smiling at the dwarf's simplicity and harmless freedom, but checking the inclination, she almost immediately enquired whether any further attempt had been made to capture the unfortunate Mable Calcroft.

"Why, for that matter, the gaoler seemed loath enough to let her off so easily," replied Christopher; "but it so happened that my friend Hugh happened to be present at the time, and being a lover of the fair sex, he swore with a round oath to knock down the first man that offered to go in pursuit. Of course, that was enough, and the old woman may thank the giant and her lucky stars that she has not been provided with a lodging in one of our deepest and most filthy dungeons."

"And her son," exclaimed the queen, "what has become of him?"

"Oh, he is safe enough, believe me," answered Christopher; "he has been brought hither on a charge of uttering seditious words against your majesty, and his Grace of Northumberland will take especial care to prevent his doing any further mischief. In fact, he is under the care of a guard of soldiers, who are only waiting for orders to carry him before the duke for examination."

"The poor fellow must not be too severely punished for expressing his own honest opinion," observed the queen after pausing a few moments. "He is perfectly harmless, I believe, and I would that I could say as much for all my other enemies.—But the night air feels chill and damp, and I would now return to those who are, doubtless, looking anxiously for my return."

"Will your majesty mind staying here alone while I go and get a light from one of the warders?"

"Certainly;—what danger have I to apprehend?"

"No danger, your highness," answered the dwarf, "but it is not many females that would have courage to stay here alone at this hour of the night. The place is now filled with people, many of whom are not over friendly to your grace, and who, perhaps, would not be very particular to the way they might use to get rid of you for ever."

"I fear them not," said the queen. "My foes would not lack an opportunity long if they meant to do me any mischief, and ever if they should murder me, there would be one consolation in being removed from a situation so full of peril as the one I at present occupy. Leave me, Sir Dwarf, provide yourself with a light and return hither with what speed you can, for I would gladly leave a place the gloom and loneliness of which have filled my soul with sadness."

Cristopher hastened away with what speed he could, and scarcely had his retiring footstep ceased to sound through the quadrangle, when a low step was heard approaching from an opposite direction, and on turning her head in the direction from whence the intruder seemed to be approaching, Jane thought she beheld, at no great distance off, the figure of a man muffled up in his cloak, and closely regarding her. Terrified at this fearful apparition, she would have screamed out for assistance, but at that instant the object of her alarm sprang forward, and her arm was firmly held in the grasp of the stranger.

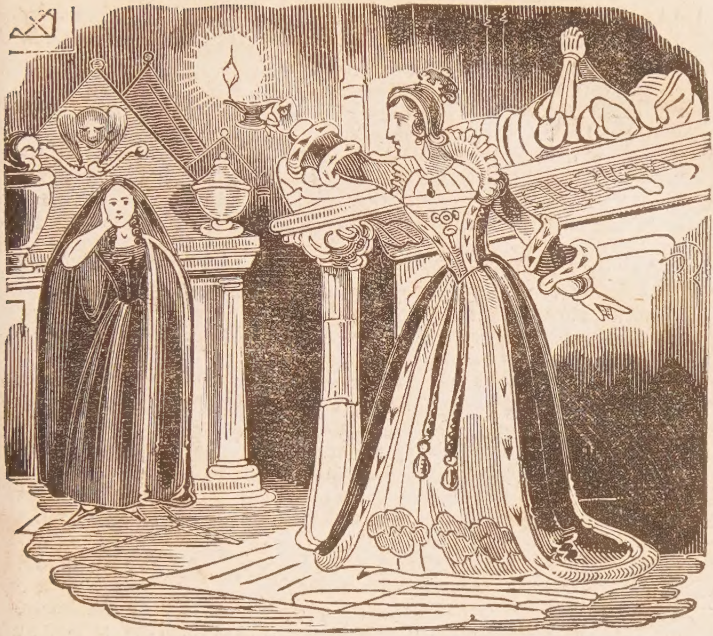
"Silence!" he exclaimed, in a suppressed voice; "I am here to warn you of danger; an instant's hesitation and you are lost!"

"What mean these words of fearful import?" cried Jane, stepping back, and endeavouring to release herself from the person who had thus assailed; "with what danger am I threatened?—Speak, or, believing thee to be an impostor, I will cry aloud for aid."

"Then would thy fate be sealed!" exclaimed the man, in whose voice the queen thought she could recognise the harsh tone of Simon Renard. "I am armed, lady, and were it necessary I should not hesitate to bury this poinard's point in thy heart."

"Merciful heaven!" cried the queen, as the glittering blade flashed before her eyes, "am I then betrayed into the hands of my enemies!"

"All, even life itself, depends upon your own prudence," exclaimed the



other. "It is not your life that is sought unless we should be driven to desperation, but I am leagued with men who would perish on the scaffold rather than see the ambitious designs of Northumberland brought to a successful issue. You understand, my lady, the crown must be resigned to her whose rights have been invaded to suit the purposes of one whose arrogance has raised against him the hatred of many."

"And to execute your traitorous designs, you have come armed against the life of a woman!" cried Jane with better emphasis. "Shame on thee, for a recreant whose evil plottings require thee to turn a midnight assassin against a weak, powerless woman, whom thou shouldst rather aid than wrong."

"Nay," exclaimed the other, "thy reproaches are ill-timed, lady;—I am here to serve, not to injure thee, and thou shalt find me a fast and sincere friend if thou will but resign a crown which thou canst not retain with safety to thyself."

"And what if I reject thy counsel?"

"Death!"

"Hah! how know'st thou that?"

"Thou hast had warning of it in the chapel;—dost thou not remember the axe that fell at thy feet scarce half an hour since?"

"I do! I do!" cried the queen, shuddering at the recollection.

"It was a sign vouchsafed by heaven for thy deliverance," exclaimed the other. "It speaks to thee in a warning voice of horrors that are to ensue;—of death upon the scaffold!"

"Forbear!—in mercy, forbear!" cried the terrified queen.

"Nay, this is no time for idle trifling, answered the man;—"I can read thy destiny, and as surely as there is a heaven above us, so surely wilt thou pay the dreadful penalty of death, unless my warning is heeded in time. Say then,—wilt thou lay down the vain happiness by following the more humble path which I know thine own inclination would induce thee to adopt?"

"Nay, it were unfit that I should hear thee any longer upon this subject," exclaimed the queen firmly. "I have taken the step that exalts me to the highest place in this realm, and I will maintain my position whatever may be the result of it. Had my own wishes been consulted, I never should have quitted the humble life I lately led, but having once accepted the crown of England, I cannot now leave my friends to the vindictive wrath of those who would not fail to punish them for the course they have adopted."

"How!" exclaimed the other fiercely;—"is the voice of the people then to be disregarded because thine own ambition leads thee to maintain a position for which heaven never ordained thee? If thou dost, then art thou an usurper, and the wrath of thine enemies can be allayed only by thy death."

"Hah!—dost thou again threaten me?"

"I do," answered the other, "and when too late, thou will find that I have the power to carry those threats into certain execution. There is a league formed against thee, in which the best and noblest blood of England is joined, and an oath has been taken to pluck thee down from thy throne, even though it may be necessary to take thy life upon the scaffold. Be warned, then I say, and spare the horrors which must else fall upon thy unhappy country."

"Ere I resolve upon the matter," cried Jane, tell me who it is that makes so peremptory a demand to his sovereign."

"My name thou canst not know at present," answered the other, "but of this you may be assured—I am one who is resolved to stop at no obstacle until my design is fully and completely accomplished."

"I know thee for an enemy," exclaimed the queen, "but thine arts I despise, since there are thousands of loyal hearts in England which beat only to maintain me in the situation to which I have been thus exalted. Upon their faith and honour do I firmly rely, and am content to rest all upon the zeal of my faithful adherents."

"And do you forget the blood that must flow, if once the sward is drawn by the friends of the Princess Mary?" demanded the other. "Is your heart so selfish grown that you can regard with indifference the utter destruction of all who foolishly rank themselves among the number of your allies?"

"Nay, thou presumest upon my woman's weakness," exclaimed the queen;—"thou hast sought me in this lone place, and at this midnight hour to terrify me into the desertion of my friends, whose zeal has been exerted in my behalf."

"Thou hast said right!" exclaimed the other hoarsely; "I am here armed as you have seen me, and rather would I plunge my poniard in your breast, than live to witness those evils which must follow your obstinacy in keeping possession of the crown. Again, I warn thee, lady, and thy refusal to comply with my advice will be the signal for thine immediate death."

Again the dagger gleamed brightly in the hands of the ruffian, and scarcely knowing what she did, the terrified queen seized the upraised arm of her assailant, and uttered a scream so loud and piercing, that it seemed to penetrate to the very inmost recesses of the ancient fortress. At this moment, a light was seen gleaming from a distance, and being thus pressed by danger, the man suddenly returned the dagger to its sheath, and muttering forth the heaviest imprecations, disappeared in an instant from the place.

When little Christopher arrived,—for it was he who had thus opportunely made his appearance,—he found the queen lying in a state of insensibility upon the stone staircase, and in spite of all his endeavours to restore her to animation, he discovered that his labour was thrown away, and that it was now necessary to procure further assistance from some of the ladies in attendance, who had been left in the apartments of her majesty. For this purpose he hastily scrambled up the steps,—ran through the dark narrow passages that led to the part of the Tower he wished to gain, and in an inconceivable short space of time, returned with two of the queen's favourite attendants.

By this time, however, Jane had sufficiently recovered to raise hersel from the position in which she had been left by the dwarf, and on the arrival of the two females she was found resting against a pillar, and weeping bitterly at the recollection of the scene that had just passed. On hearing the voices of her friends, however, she once more raised her head, and endeavouring to assume a more cheerful voice she said :—

"You are welcome both to the presence of your mistress, whose wanderings about this wild spot had nearly terminated in losing herself among the intricacies of the place."

"Methinks it had nearly terminated in something more than that," exclaimed the dwarf, venturing to put in a word or two upon the occasion.

"How?" cried the queen, fearful lest he might have been a listener to the interview that had just been broken off. "Dost thou mean to say, Sir Knave, that the person of thy sovereign is not safe in this well-guarded place?"

"The dwarf premises too much upon your grace's kindness," said the Lady Catherine May. "He has been made s pet of by the foolish people hereabout, and forgets the respect due to the presence of your majesty."

"When danger lurks near it is high time to forget all ceremonies," observed Kit with a profound bow to the queen. "In point of loyalty, I yield to no man, but I cannot shut my eyes when treason stalks abroad for the destruction of one who we are bound to respect as our sovereign."

"Peace, sirrah!" cried the queen, anxious to check an observation which would lead to a topic she wished to avoid. "Thy tongue is far nimbler than thy wit; and it is my desire that thou say'st no more upon a subject so painful to myself."

"As your majesty pleases, but—"

"Hast thou not heard the queen command thee to be silent?" cried Lady Catherine; "or would'st thou for ever forfeit her esteem by thus harping upon an affair that we are all convinced is perfectly harmless—"

"I know not what your ladyship is pleased to call harmless," said the dwarf; "but this I know, that somebody passed me as I was running to her majesty's assistance; and if I may trust my eyesight, the person was no other than—"

"Who?" demanded Lady Catherine.

"Aye, who?" exclaimed Lady Marianne Scroope, whose curiosity was somewhat excited by the words of the dwarf; "tell us who it was this instant, on pain of our displeasure, who the person was that thou sawest making his escape?"

"Have I your majesty's permission to explain myself upon the subject?" asked the little man.

"Why, aye," returned Jane; "for I see thou canst not easily keep the secret, and therefore would it be quickly spread abroad as soon as you have an opportunity of doing so among your companions. Speak, sirrah, and as thou would'st escape whipping, see that thou speakest nothing but the truth."

"Well, then, he I saw running away so quickly was none other than the renowned Spaniard, Don Simon Renard!"

"Simon Renard!" exclaimed the two maids of honour with the greatest astonishment.

"Aye," returned the dwarf, "or my name is not Christopher Dumps, that's all. He nearly ran over me in the dark, and he was going to strike at me with a dagger, but I ran between his legs, snd thus prolonged a life that I must own I am not yet quite tired of."

"And you are certain it was Renard?" said Catherine.

"As positive as that I have now the honour to stand in the presence of her majesty, the Queen of England."

"It would be useless to conceal the fact any longer," interposed Jane; "the dwarf is perfectly right in the guess he has made, though I would fain have kept the matter secret till we have a better opportunity to charge him with the foul treason he and his confederates contemplate. In spite of his attempt to disguise his voice, I knew it to be that of the wily Spaniard, though I concealed the discovery I had made knowing as I did that my life would have been hazarded by the disclosure."

"The villain must be looked to, at any rate," said Lady Catherine, "he is a dangerous foe, and is, no doubt, plotting some terrible mischief, whilst he imagines we are wasting our time in this gloomy Tower. Your highness has by this time found that he is a foe not lightly to be thought of, and a very short time will serve to throw you into the power of your enemies, so that the efforts of your loyal subjects will prove of little or no avail."

"If he is plotting with my foes the mischief is by this time accomplished," answered the queen; "that he is vindictive, revengeful, and blood-thirsty, I have but too much reason to believe, yet with the certainty of all that I still lack the means to foil his most iniquitous designs."

"For my own part," exclaimed the Lady Marianne Scroope, "I would soon find a way to put an end to this designing Spaniard's treachery. He should be made to know the respect due to a sovereign of this fair kingdom, or I warrant me he should learn a lesson that would be useful, not only to himself, but to all other traitors who dare to plot against the crown."

"Prithee, Marianne," cried her companion archly, "and how would'st thou accomplish this much desired task?"

"He should learn that it is an easier matter to get into the Tower of London than to get out of it," replied the other. "Her majesty has but to give her word for it, and the arch traitor would find a lodging in one of the dungeons, from whence he could only come forth on a promise of behaving better for the future. It is an easy remedy, Catherine, for ridding oneself of an enemy, and I am one of those who would not hesitate to let this artful don learn the danger of plotting against those who have both the power and will to punish his perfidy."

"By St. George, lady," exclaimed the dwarf, "but thou would'st soon set the world together by the ears. We would have Spain for our enemy in no time, and the chances are that the imprisonment of this same ambassador would give us a taste of war that we would not forget for some time to come."

"Here let our conversation drop for the present," said the queen. "I am now able so return to ef my apartment, and perhaps his Grace of Northumberland may by th time have some message to deliver to me rom the council which we l t sitting."

So saying, the queen took an arm of each of her attendants, and preceded by the dwarf carrying the lamp, they returned by the same gloomy passages they had threaded not long before. The echoes of their footsteps sounded drearily as they proceeded, and every portion of the distance presented an air of coldness and desolation, that struck the heart of the hapless queen with feelings of dread that she could not overcome. At last, they reached the apartments of her majesty, upon entering which, they found the Duke of Northumberland pacing up and down with hasty steps, as if impatient for the return of his royal daughter-in-law.

I am rejoiced at the return of your grace," he said, stopping suddenly as the queen approached; " though, sooth to say, it is somewhat hazardous to be thus wandering about the Tower, when there are so many within its walls whose plots you have every reason to dread."

" Alas! and wherefore should I have so many enemies?" cried the queen in a tone of anguish. " 'Til the evil hour when I was induced to accept the crown of England, I was happy in the consciousness of having nothing but friends about me; now foes have usurped their place, and each hour is pregnant with increasing dangers."

" Your majesty," exclaimed Northumberland, " must not blame your well wishers for saying that which they believed would turn out not only to your own advantage, but also to that of this great empire. It was to that end I prevailed on you to accept the throne of England, and, with heaven's good aid, I will yet so firmly establish you in it, that your enemies shall at last give up their mad opposition in despair."

" And in the mean time I am to become a prey to griefs that otherwise I should never have known!" cried Jane, reproachfully."

" Tut! let your reliance be placed upon me, and I promise to steer you safely through these shoals and quicksands," replied the duke, and then glancing towards the door, he continued—" but yonder comes Lord Guilford Dudley he has an affair of the deepest import to confer with you about, and as I have business requiring my immediate presence elsewhere, I will leave him to explain the decision to which the council has just come."

" With these words the Duke of Northumberland quitted the apartment, and almost at the same moment Lord Dudley entered the presence of his royal bride.

CHAPTER IX.

LORD GUILDFORD DUDLEY AND THE QUEEN.—THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND EXHIBITS FURTHER PROOFS OF HIS AMBITIOUS PROJECTS.—HOW DUDLEY RECEIVED THE LIE DIRECT; AND THE ALARMING REPORTS THAT ARE CIRCULATED ABOUT GILBERT HEMINGSLEY.

As her husband approached, Jane could perceive by his downcast looks that he was the bearer of unwelcome intelligence and that he had scarcely yet summoned resolution enough to unburden himself of the message with which he was charged. Presently, however, he ventured to direct his gaze towards her, and perceiving the tenderness with which she was regarding him a smile of love once more illumed his handsome countenance, and then throwing aside all reserve, he seized her offered hand and pressed it fervently to his lips. Then quickly subduing the emotion that had at first been so apparent, he said, though not without some hesitation:—

"For the first time, my dearest Jane, I present myself before you to urge a request that I almost fear will be met by a decided refusal, yet our safety perhaps depends upon your acquiesence, and on that score alone do I urge you to yield to a suggestion which has just been proposed by the council of your friends."

"Methinks," replied Jane, smiling, "their lordships could not have chosen a better messenger to deliver their request than he who now presents himself before me. They know, however unpalatable their proposition may be, that I could scarce refuse any request to it when urged by him I love."

"You will yield then to the pressing emergency that demands the prompt acquiescence to their suggestions?"

"Nay, I said not that," answered the queen. "I will hear what their lordships propose, and, should it be prudent to do so will cheerfully waive any scruples of my own to convince them of the utter confidence I repose in their good judgment.

"Tis well," exclaimed Lord Guildford Dudley, "and now do I feel assured that my mission will be brought to a successful termination. Know then, that their lordships have after mature deliberation, resolved to urge upon your majesty the policy of giving me a share of that throne to which you have been called by the friends of religion and peace."

"Indeed!" cried the queen with unaffected surprise, "then it seems their lordships, in their wisdom, would merely make a puppet of me, for the furtherance of their own designs."

"The council has not come to the conclusion unadvisedly," answered Dudley; "your best friends begin to perceive that the crown must be maintained by a more vigorous arm than a woman's, and for that reason alone they have ventured to pray your majesty's concurrence in what they know to be for the benefit of the nation."

Jane now began to see through the ambitious designs entertained by the Duke of Northumberland; she was already awakened to a consciousness of the servile part she was expected to play in the affair, and her pride took fire at the direct insult which had been offered her. She could have wept as she thought of the peaceful life from which she had been dragged for the accomplishment of the guilty purposes of her designing admirers, but repressing her rising tears she replied firmly, yet mildly:—

"His Grace of Northumberland doubtless believes that a woman's mind is to be easily moulded according to his own fashions; he wonld make me the stepping stone for his son's advancement to the royal power, and then leave me to the wretchedness of mind produced by the ill-advised step I have taken. But he shall yet find that I have more firmness than he expects, and that I could rather bow my head to the block than become a mere tool for the accomplishment of his designs."

"You reject then the proposition of the council?"

"I do."

"But have you considered the misery that resolution may bring down upon our unhappy country?"

"I have considered all," answered Jane, "and am not to be moved by the threats and entreaties of those who care not if they bring about my own fall, so that they secure their future aggrandisement. One bold step, my Lord Dudley, brought me to the throne, and I am ready to descend from my elevation whenever I can do so with safety to myself and those who have aided me in my advancement to sovereign power."

"Is that the message I am to deliver to their lordships?" asked Dudley with evident chagrin.

"It is the only one I can give," answered the queen; "they have once seen me yield to their importunities, but henceforth I will be mistress of my own actions, whenever I know that the peace and happiness of the realm I am called upon to govern is at stake."

"If that is your majesty's decision I would entreat you to consider what may be the result of this day's resolution."

"I have considered it, my lord."

"But not so as to weigh matters fairly and justly," returned her husband. "Nay, look not thus reproachfully upon me," he continued, "for I would rather die at your feet than that one unkind word of mine should excite the anger of her I so tenderly love. It is a matter of deep import that I have come to urge, and nothing but an anxious wish to secure your own happiness should have induced me to be the bearer of a proposition so repugnant to your soul."

"It requires me to hear you say so, my lord," answered the queen, "for I almost began to fear you might have inherited some of the dangerous ambition that has hitherto urged your father. I have myself grown giddy at the height to which I have been thus suddenly elevated, and most glad would I be were some opportunity to offer by which I might once more seek the happy retirement from that which I have been dragged."

"By heavens, then," exclaimed Dudley, "your majesty's wishes may be gratified sooner than you expect?"

"Say you so, my good lord,—and by what means, I pray you?"

"The Princess Mary has escaped from Kenning-hall."

"And from death too, in all probability;" answered Jane, "aye, my lord, you may start, but from dark words that have fallen, I know that she was doomed to perish on the scaffold by those who are interested in maintaining me on the throne."

"Nay, your highness does my father an injustice," exclaimed Lord Guildford Dudley, warmly. "That he is ambitious I am well aware, and that he hates the Princess Mary I have known for some time past, yet, he is no assassin, Jane, nor would he injure your rival further than by taking sufficient care to prevent her seizing the crown of England."

"'Tis false!" exclaimed a voice from behind, the deep, hollow tones of which seemed as if it had proceeded from a tomb.

"Hah!" cried the startled nobleman, "we have eaves-droppers among us! But be who he may he shall pay dearly for his presumption in thus daring to intrude upon the privacy of this meeting!"

And so saying, Dudley drew his sword, and passing hastily round the room, he removed the tapestry with which the walls were hung, in order to discover the person who had thus boldly called his father's honour in question. His search, however, was fruitless, and he was just pausing to meditate upon the mysterious interruption when the same voice was heard in another direction, laughing derisively at the vain efforts he had made to discover the retreat of his concealed enemy.

"By heaven, this must be seen to!" exclaimed Dudley, furiously. "We have been overheard, your majesty, and if, as I believe, the eaves-dropper is an enemy, he will not fail to take advantage of the discovery he has made."

"Nay, my lord, I think not so seriously of the matter, as you seem to do," returned the queen. "Believe me, we have been deceived, and the danger you apprehend is further removed from us than you think for."

" But the voice—"

" Was in all probability a deception."

" Impossible;—and then the loud laughter which followed—"

" Was, I dare say, nothing more than the loud mirth of some of the domestics who have been revelling in the hall to night."

" Your grace," replied Dudley, " is more easily satisfied upon that point than I am myself. There are traitors in the Tower—friends of your rival, Mary, and believe me they will leave no method untried by which to secure your ruin."

" Heaven protect me against the evil deeds of my enemies! " cried the queen fervently. " That I have many foes I am but too well aware, and something assures me that it will not be long before I am made to feel the full weight of their rancour.

The queen shuddered as she spoke these words, for her mind recurred to her adventure in the chapel, and the fallen axe, which appeared to be but too sure a prognostication of the terrible doom that awaited her. She, however, refused to confide the secret of her thoughts to Lord Dudley, though urgently pressed to do so, and anxious to change the subject, she begged of him to return to the Council Chamber, and inform her friends of the resolution to which she had come. It was in vain, that Dudley endeavoured to prevail upon her to adopt a measure which he had been sent to propose; the queen was resolute, but finding that he still persisted in trying to alter her intentions she said, while tears of sorrow chased each other down her pale cheek:—

" Think not, my dear lord, that I am either perverse or unkind in thus maintaining a resolution which, in my own mind, I know to be the best for the happiness of all concerned. We have already too many enemies to contend against—your fathers conduct,—well intended though it may be,—has created foes where we might have looked for staunch adherents to our cause, and were I to accede to this last request of his, it would loosen the few remaining bands that yet support me in my present elevation. Upon you, also, I should draw down the wrath of my enemies, and thus should I involve another in the same ruin that threatens instantly to fall upon me."

" And does your majesty indeed think so lightly of me, as to believe that I would shrink from sharing your dangers?"

" Nay, I know you to be as brave as honourable," answered the queen, " and it is only my love for you that has induced me to reject the proposition of those who would madly hurry us to destruction. They seek to place you upon a throne, Dudley, but little think they how soon the honour would be succeeded by the headsman's axe and a bloody grave,"

" But I am as willing to share the danger with you, as well as the honour," returned Dudley. " Nay, thou hast sworn at the holy altar to obey me, and it is now time that I exert a husband's authority, to compel thee to consent!"

" I am thy queen, Dudley," answered Jane, with dignity, " and by the allegiance thou have sworn, I command thee to urge me no more on this painful subject. A few days may perhaps see me a prisoner within these walls, which now own me for their mistress, and I would not have my soul further wrung by knowing that my own weakness had subjected thee to a similar punishment."

Dudley was about to enforce the matter, with yet further arguments in his own favour, when Christopher Dumps entered the apartment, and with a thousand apologies for his intrusion, annonnced that he had come from the Duke of Northumberland to inquire whether anything

had been seen of Gilbert Hemmingsley, whose long absence had given rise to serious apprehensions for his safety. Upon receiving an answer in the negative, the dwarf appeared to be much puzzled, and dashing his velvet cap violently on the ground, he exlaimed :

"Thunder and furies, but it is most strange, my lord!—The young man who I began to feel a special esteem for, has been betrayed into some of the dungeons belonging to this gloomy place, and the next thing we hear of will be that he has been barbarously murdered, and—"

"Psha! these fears are idle and unfounded," interrupted Dudley, who could scarcely refrain from laughing at the vehemence of the little man;—"Gilbert Hemmingsley is a gallant whose heart is not proof against the bright eyes of a woman, and I would wager a purse of rose-nobles against the solitary silver penny in thy pocket, that we shall hear of him now before thou hast well delivered thy message."

"Perhaps," said Jane, "it woud be better to make further enquiries before we reckon too surely on his safety, as the squire and faithful follower of your father, Gilbert Hemmingsley, is not without his enemies; nor is the Tower free from those who would take the first opportunity that offered to rid themselves of one whose fidelity to his master they may dread."

"Your majesty is quite of my way of thinking," replied Kit pompously. "Master Gilbert Hemmingsley has been made a butt for the shafts of your foes, and take my word for it, he is now suffering for his love of your grace and the good Duke of Northumberland."

"And what reason, good Sir Dwarf, hast thou for thinking so seriously upon this subject?" asked Dudley.

"One that I fear is unswerable," exclaimed Christopher. "In the first place we know that the squire was no great favourite with the friends of the Princess Mary ; and in the second, we happen to be perfectly well aware, that a person, not long since, was taken by Master Fetterlock to a dungeon in some out-of-the-way part of the Tower. The prisoner was muffled up in a cloak which had been thrown over his head ; but by the cries he uttered as they took him away, there is little doubt that is was indeed no other than poor Gilbert Hemmingsley."

"Alas ! they will murder him !" sighed the Queen.

"If they do, woe unto those who take part in the outrage," exclaimed Dudley vehemently. "And yet," he continued, after pacing up and down the room for a moment or two, "this may be some idle alarm raised by the fears of those who fancy there is danger in every breeze that blows. However, the affair shall be seen into, and if I find any truth in it, the plotters shall be made to feel the wrath of one who is ever ready to strike in the cause of the helpless."

So saying, he left the queen in order to return to the council, and almost immediately afterwards the dwarf, making his very best bow, retired to ponder over, in his own mind, whether something could not be done to find out if his suspicions about Gilbert Hemmingsley were true or false.

CHAPTER X.

THE DWARF OVERHEARS A CONVERSATION OF SOME IMPORTANCE ; HIS INTERVIEW WITH MASTER MARTIN FETTERLOCK, AND THE RESULT TO WHICH IT LEADS ; THE CHALLENGE ; AND HOW A VERY DESPERATE COMBAT IS INTERRUPTED BY THE SEASONABLE ARRIVAL OF A FRIEND.

Crossing the Tower Green, and directing his footsteps through sundry narrow passages that presented themselves in his way, our little friend, Christopher Dumps, at last reached that part of the fortress in which the Stone Kitchen was situated. On arriving here, he was just about entering its huge portal, in search of his friend, the gigantic warder, when a light, slowly moving along at no great distance off, caught his eye, and from the caution observed by the person who carried it, he felt pretty certain that no good was going on in that quarter. While he was yet watching it and wondering what to do, the light suddenly disappeared, as if hastily concealed beneath a cloak ; and presently afterwards he could hear the low, suppressed voices of two persons in conversation. This at once served to confirm him in his purpose. and stealthily creeping along under the shadow of the wall, he at last approached the speakers so closely, that he was enabled to overhear all that was passing between them. In one of these persons he could plainly recognise the voice of Martin Fetterlock, but who the other was, completely baffled his penetration to discover. One thing, however, was certain, their business seemed to be of the greatest importance ; and by the low tones in which their conversation was carried on, it was pretty evident they had no great wish that a single syllable of it should reach any other ears than their own. It was a minute or two before the dwarf could gather anything from what was passing between them, but at last he heard the stranger enquire anxiously if he was sure the prisoner was quite safe.

"Aye, sir, as safe as locks, bolts, and bars can make him," answered the gaoler. "He is in one of the strongest cells in this old fortress; and if he manages to find his way out of it, I'll consent to forfeit the reward your honour has promised me."

"'Tis well," answered the other; "and now see that you keep your own counsel carefully. Nobody must know what has become of this stripling; and whenever any enquiries are made, you must reply that he is supposed to have swam over the moat, and thus effected his escape."

"I understand you, signor," whispered Fetterlock; "you would keep him alive till enquiry ceases to be made for him, and afterwards despatch him in his dungeon whenever we find that the deed can be done without fear of discovery?"

"Such is my plan; do yòu promise to aid me in it?"

"Why, for that matter, I am not a common cut-throat, your excellency," answered Fetterlock. "The youth is a comely stripling after all, and never should an arm of mine have been raised against him if he had not dared to rob me of the girl I was in hopes of making my wife."

"Why, man, that reason alone should be sufficient to arm you against his life," exclaimed the other. "In love, no man will suffer himself to be tamely crossed; especially when the maiden happens to be fair and youthful, as you say is the case with the pretty——"

"Hist! name her not, signor," whispered the gaoler; "we may chance to be overheard; and, in that case, it would afford a clue that might involve both you and myself in a dilemma that we could not easily get out of. There is, however, one thing which should be done speedily; short reckonings, your excellency, make long friends, and I would now speak touching the reward you promised to give me on condition that ——"

"You secured this stripling so that there should be no fear of his ever escaping from our clutches," interrupted the stranger, in whom the reader has no doubt discovered, ere now, the wily Spaniard, Don Simon Renard.

"That wās the condition, certainly," answered Fetterlock, "and now having performed my part of the contract I would claim of you the promised reward."

"'Tis here," returned the other, placing a purse in the hands of the turnkey, which from its sound seemed well filled with gold coins;—"take it, Master Fetterlock, and when next we meet be prepared to receive my orders to despatch the prisoner."

"Must he die then,?"

"Aye, for so it is decreed," replied the Spaniard.

"But suspicion will immediately fall upon me."

"Not if proper precautions are used," answered the other. "I have a poison that will effect the deed without giving rise to evil thoughts, either against thyself or any body else. It is slow in its operations, but the result will be most certain."

"Villains!" exclaimed the dwarf, whose prudence could no longer hold his tongue in subjection.

At this moment the Spaniard hastily moved away, and Martin Fetterlock was about to follow his example, when coming suddenly in contact with the dwarf, he had nearly stumbled over him in his haste to effect his escape. In an instant his hand clutched the throat of the unfortunate Christopher, who would most certainly have fallen a victim to the rage of his enemy, had not fortune favoured so far as to suffer his escape just at the moment when the gaoler was about to sacrifice him to his own unbounded rage. But though Christopher Dumps has thus succeeded in eluding the grasp of his more powerful opponent he was not to be terrified into running away like a coward; so plucking forth his rapier, he threw himself upon the defensive, and called upon Martin to shew his valour by instantly giving his satisfaction for the rude handling he had so narrowly escaped.

"Why thou misshapen whelp, thinkest thou I would draw upon such worthless carrion as thyself?" demanded the other, scornfully. "Thinkest thou swords were made for no better purpose than to make mince-meat of such puny reptiles as thyself?"

"Then art thou a coward and a bully for thy pains!" exclaimed the little man almost choked with passion. "Dost thou hear me?—I call the a coward and a bully—and if that is not enough to rouse thy courage, I tell thee more—that thou art a murderer in intention, if not in deed!"

"Thou art a false knave to call me so," returned the gaoler, scarcely able to restrain his wrath. "Who, besides thyself, dares call me by such foul names?"

"Ask him who left thee scarce a minute since," answered the dwarf. "Hast thou not agreed to take his gold for ridding him of a foe by means of poison?"

"Ha! am I then betrayed?"

"Aye, and by your own lips, Master Fetterlock," replied Christopher. "I overheard all that passed between you and the stranger that has just departed, and it is to save you from the crime of committing a cruel murder that I have now trusted myself within reach of your arm."

"And who will believe your words, even if I should suffer you to go hence and babble what you have overheard?" demanded Fetterlock. "In this place there is no one to speak a word against me, or who would give credit to any report you might raise."

"Perhaps I may try that at all events," answered the dwarf, "for I am determined at any hazard to save the young man you have conspired to murder."

"Say but one word and you destroy him," replied the gaoler. "You charge me with plotting the destruction of one you are pleased to call your friend;—grant that it is so,—that in fact he is now in a dungeon under my care, will not your interference lead to his languishing out a miserable existence, whilst I am suffering loss of liberty through your folly? He must perish of starvation, for none besides myself know in what part of the Tower he is imprisoned."

"That may be," replied the dwarf, "and yet you surely would not be so fiendish as to destroy the life of a fellow creature for the paltry bribe that yonder skulking fellow gave you."

"What I do, or my motives for it, are equally of little consequence to thee," answered Fetterlock. "However, you seem to know something that I would have kept a secret, and therefore if you feel disposed to accept of this purse, we may perhaps be better friends in future."

"Nay, I will have nothing to do with thy paltry gold," exclaimed Christopher, spurning with his foot the gold which the other had thrown down before him. "I know thee for a villain, Martin Fetterlock, and before another half hour has passed over thy head, thou shalt learn that the dungeons of the Tower are as capable of holding thee as any body else. Or I will give thee battle if thou wilt, and revenge upon thee the wrongs thou hast done thy prisoner."

"Have I not already told thee that I will have nothing to do with such a contemptible antagonist?" cried the other. "Why should I draw my sword, when with my foot I could crush thy miserable carcass in the very earth?"

"At any rate," exclaimed the valourous dwarf, "you shall not go without the coward's blow to comfort you in the midst of your villainous and evil practices."

And as he said this, he dealt the gaoler such a blow with the flat of his sword that the other started back a pace or two, and drawing his rapier he would quickly have exterminated his antagonist on the spot, had not Hugh, the gigantic porter, rushed forward and snatched the dwarf up in his arms just as Martin Fetterlock was about to deal him a thrust of his rapier, that would most likely have sent his soul on a visit to the other world.

"Why how now? bully Fetterlock," he exclaimed angrily—"would'st thou murder a little wretch like this, whose head scarcely reaches to thy knee, and who must fall beneath thy sword, even as grass falls under the scythe of the mower."

"Let me get at him, good Hugh;—cried the struggling Christopher; "I charge thee put me down, or by St. George I shall turn my wrath from the gaoler to thyself. Put me down, I say, lest with rage and vexation I should burst."

"Keep still thou little fool, and learn to know when thou art well off," returned the giant, disregarding the threats of the dwarf. "Thou hast no equal match in this man, who would presently spit thee on his sword for a wilful braggart as thou art, and I should lose the only subject of my laughter that all the Tower contains. Throw away thy weapon, man, and if thou hast a just cause for quarrel with this gaoler, I'll take it upon myself to promise that the quittance shall soon be made."

"Another time, and the misshapen varlet shall feel the vengeance his insolence hath provoked," exclaimed Martin Fetterlock, preparing to take his departure now that he found it was no longer safe for him to remain there.

"And what, I prithee, has put thee in this huffish humour, master gaoler?" demanded Hugh. "The dwarf is usually quiet enough, and methinks those must have provoked him greatly to have excited his ire as I just now beheld it."

"He is a villain and a knave!" exclaimed the little fellow, brandishing his sword as the giant held him aloft at arms length. "He hath imprisoned young Gilbert Hemmingsley, the favourite squire of his Grace of Northumberland, and from what I overheard just now, there is little doubt but the youth will be murdered in his dungeon, unless something is done immediately to rescue him"

"Does Christopher Dumps speak the truth of thee?" asked Hugh, scowling ominously upon the turnkey; "confess that thou art at thy villainous pranks again, and thy life shall not be worth half an hour's purchase."

"He lies most foully," answered Fetterlock doggedly. "Of the youth he speaks of I know nothing, save that he came hither in the train of his master, and upon whom he may now be in attendance for any thing I know to the contrary. But why do I stay here to be questioned by those who have no business to do so? I have been charged unjustly with a foul deed, and therefore shall I now leave thee to unravel the mytery as best thou canst."

Having thus delivered himself, Martin Fetterlock walked hastily away, leaving Hugh the giant and diminutive friend to settle the affair between them as they could. As for Hugh, he seem to treat the affair in a very cavalier manner, declaring that, in his opinion, the turnkey knew nothing at all about Gilbert, and further stating it to be his opinion, that even if he did, very little good would be done by attempting to bluster him into a confession. Not so, however, thought the dwarf —he had heard enough to convince him that a great deal of treachery was in progress, and being fully resolved to sift the whole affair to the very bottom, he entreated his bulky friend to give him all the assistance in his power towards dragging the guilty parties to a just punishment of their crimes.

"But what evidence hast thou to depend on?" asked Hugh, after turning the matter over in his mind.

"My own, to be sure," answered the little fellow conceitedly. "I overheard Martin Fetterlock and a stranger in conversation just now, and among other things, they spoke of a prisoner who they were going to dispose of by unfair means. In fact, they spoke of poisoning him, and unless speedy measures are taken the young man will be made worm's meat of before many hours more pass over his head."

"This is a strange rigmarole sort of story of thine, Master Dumps, at any rate," observed the giant. "It seems the testimony that is to convict these men rests upon thyself, and yet all who know anything of the turnkey, must be aware that he will stoutly deny the charge, and thus the matter ends in thine own utter discomfiture."

"Then thou woulds't suffer the two scoundrels to escape?"

"Nay, I said not that," answered the other, "but I would counsel thee to let matters rest till thou hast better evidence to convict them on. Be patient, therefore, and I will, myself, assist in bringing the villany you speak of to light. But above all things, let not thy foolish tongue speak of these things to a single soul, or our plans will be defeated. Be silent, man, and we will yet so work matters that they shall end to thine entire satisfaction!"

"Agreed!" exclaimed Christopher; "I will follow your advice good Master Hugh, but mind, it must be on condition that you set yourself speedily to work, lest the young man should perish while we are wasting time."

"Aye, aye, there shall be no time lost I warrant you," answered Hugh, shifting the little fellow to his shoulder, and preparing to carry him off in triumph, "Gilbert Hemmings, or whatever other name you call him, shall be cared for, and it shall be no fault of mine if any ill befalls him through the malice of his enemies. But come, it is now high time that we should adjourn to the Stone Kitchen, for my throat is parched with long abstinence, seeing that no ale has passed these lips for a full half hour, and a flaggon of Master Ralph Dalston's stingo, will serve to give me the better heart to set about the task I have undertaken.

The dwarf knew that remonstrance would be, under these circumstances, of no avail, and yielding obedience, though rather unwillingly, he was forthwith carried on the giant's shoulder into the kitchen, to which the reader has already been introduced.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GIANTS AT A BANQUET, AND THE MARVELLOUS EXECUTION THEY MAKE AMONG THE EATABLES AND DRINKABLES.—THE COMFORTS OF AN AFTER SUPPER SNOOZE MARRED IN A MOST NOVEL AND REMARKABLE MANNER.

It was growing late when the gigantic Hugh and his little friend Christopher entered the Stone Kitchen, but the former was well pleased to see that the table was well covered with various kinds of substantial viands, among which his brother Peter was playing a very active and conspicuous part. Upon an invitation being given the new comer took his place at the board, where, however. he refused to seat himself until little Christopher was snugly placed upon a stool beside him, to take his share of the good things that had been provided for the strengthening and support of their bodies. To have seen how the two huge warders eat would have astonished any one of this more effeminate age, for no sooner did they commence operations upon the various joints placed before them than the dishes were cleared of their contents, one after another, with surprising rapidity. Whole ribs of beef were cut off, as we more puny mortals, would carve chops from a loin of lamb, and devoured with a gusto truly amusing to all the spectators except Ralph Dalston, who began to entertain serious fears of a famine in the land if his two guests continued to feast themselves much longer in the way they were now doing. As for little Christopher, he was too much astonished at the execution going on before his eyes, to eat much himself; he stared at them in silent wonder, whilst the more delicate morsels with which his own trencher was provided, remained untouched before him in spite of the frequent remonstrances of his two friends, who repeatedly desired him to follow their example, and make a hearty meal of what the liberality of their host had provided.

At last, the dishes being all cleared of their contents, except the bones, Ralph Dalston began to entertain a hope that their voracious appetites were satisfied. But in this he was doomed to be wofully disappointed, for no sooner did Hugh find how matters stood, than striking the handle of his knife furiously on the table, he demanded in a voice of thunder, whether there was anything more in the larder, as his stomach was not yet half filled with the trifle they had just managed to get through ! It was in vain that Ralph declared he had not another ounce of meat left in the house, for the two giants joined in a loud remonstrance against such scurvy treatment, and furthermore declared that they would not leave the place till their appetites were fully satisfied.

To resist any longer would have been useless, and, therefore, after much grumbling, Ralph Dalston slowly left the room to see whether he could find anything more to fill the craving stomachs of his two unwelcome guests. Upon this, Hugh winked at his monster of a brother, as much as to say, it was their bounden duty to do honour to the invitation they had received from the serjeant of the pantry, and scarcely had the two brothers sharpened their knives, preparatory to another onslaught, when Ralph re-appeared, bearing in his arms a tremendous large dish, containing a cold round of beef sufficient to have afforded an ample meal to a whole regiment of hungry soldiers. Upon this, the good nature of our two Titans was marvellously restored ; they chuckled and grinned as the ponderous load of meat was placed before them, and then, carving away at it with all their might, they threatened to demolish it as they had done all that had gone before it.

By this time the patience of Dame Margaret Dalston was fairly exhausted, and after indulging in sundry grumblings and exclamations of disgust, she burst forth in open remonstrance against the beastliness and sin of indulging the appetite to excess. But the two revellers were not to be put out of countenance by the angry clatter of a woman's tongue ; they had resolved to have enough of the good fare provided for them, and whilst the incensed dame amused them with the sweet tones of her wrath, they cut away at the substantial joint till it became a mere shadow of its former self. At last, however, Peter gave in from utter repletion, and throwing himself back in his chair, he waited with philosophic calmness till his brother should have similarly filled himself from the exquisite round, which had, by this time, dwindled into the most contemptible insignificance. Yet all things must have an end, and consequently a cessation of hostilities took place, no less to the satisfaction of Ralph Dalston than to that of his equally indignant dame.

Then came the washing down of all these good things with potent ale, and it was truly marvellous to see the vast quantities of the favourite beverage which the two giants contrived to pour down their capacious throats. A measure, holding somewhat above two quarts, barely served to afford them a draught a-piece, not so much, even, being left in the bottom of the flaggon as would serve to wet the whistle of the more abstemious Christopher Dumps. Nor did one or two of these brimfull vessels serve to allay the thirst of the revellers; they were men who liked to go the "whole hog," while they were about it, and accordingly, Master Ralph was pretty well employed in running backwards and forward to the cellar, till serious alarm began to be ascertained lest the barrels should be emptied, as the dishes had been before them. It was truly miraculous to see with what ease the liquor was put out of sight, and equally wonderful was it that all they drank seemed to take no more effect upon them than if they had been swallowing so much cold water, To be sure, they seemed to grow a little sleepy upon the good things they had been so freely indulging in; but, then, Dame Dalston's incessant clatter was an effectual antidote against anything in the shape of slumber, so that the two giants were obliged to make use, every now and then, of their own stentorian lungs, in order to drown the sharp treble of the woman's quarrelsome voice.

The news of these astonishing feats soon reached the ears of numerous idlers in the Tower, who, presently, flocked to the Stone Kitchen in order to be eye-witnesses of the scene that was going forward. These were quickly seated round a table to watch the proceeding of the giants, and, perhaps, the noise and clatter that succeeded did more than anything else to keep Hugh and his brother from falling into the doze they seemed inclined to indulge themselves with. Little Christopher, too, appeared in the humour to play off all sorts of practical jokes upon the company; indeed, he knew he had full license to do so on the present occasion, for, in the first place, his two huge friends were at hand to prevent any harm befalling him; and, secondly, most people could endure more from him than they would take quietly from any one else of larger growth. In this security he played off a variety of mad pranks that kept the guests of the Stone Kitchen in a roar of laughter, and even Master Ralph Dalston, whose ill-humour had, by this time, been forgotten, was heard to declare that Christopher Dumps was the most welcome visitor he had, seeing that his droll antics were sure to draw a host of people round his well filled tables.

But even the uproar and laughter that succeeded each of the tricks that had been played off by Christopher were at length insufficient to keep the two giants awake. First, they nodded their heads like a brace of Chinese mandarins; then succeeded a gentle grunt or two, and, last of all, followed a snore by way of duet that might be well likened to a thunder-clap, or the heavy and continuous war of artillery. Now, all this might be perfectly agreeable to the two sleepers, but Dame Margaret Dalston happened to know by former experience that they were not to be very easily roused when once they got into a sound slumber, and as it was now time that they should think of closing the place for the night she gave certain hints

to her husband that it would be as well to get rid of their two unwieldy customers before they were so fast locked in the arms of sleep as to be insensible to the kicks and thumps which it would be necessary to apply in order to arouse them from their dreams.

Hereupon Ralph, who, to do him justice, was a most obedient husband, commenced the task of waking up the two giants. First of all he called them by name at the full extent of his voice; then he pulled away at their arms and shook them with all his might, and at last, finding all this useless, he kicked the soles of their feet; but Ralph might just as well have saved himself all this trouble, for the others seemed determined to have their slumber out, and the more their host annoyed them the more lustily did they give play to their nasal organs.

In this dilemma, a council of war was held to devise the best means to waking up these aukward customers, but though a thousand ingenious plans were suggested by one or another, they were all of them declared impracticable in the present case. Thus, matters were brought to a complete stand till, 'till a bright thought flashed across the mind of Dame Dalston, who, reaching down a loaded blunderbuss from the wall, declared that if any thing would wake them it would be the discharging of this weapon as close as possible to the ears of the two obstinate slumbers. Now, this idea struck every body present as being a remarkably bright one, and all concurred in its efficacy, but then, the next question that arose was, who should be the daring individual to carry the scheme into effect. Both the men, it was well known, were extremely passionate if woke up too suddenly, and dire would be their rage against the unfortunate wight who should dare to disturb them from their halcyon dreams. Few were willing to confess that their hearts were stout enough to undertake the business, and the project was in danger of falling to the ground when one, more gallant than the rest, offered to discharge the weapon on condition that his companions would promise to stand by and bear him harmless. This, of course, was readily enough promised, though it is much to be doubted whether there were any present who really meant to stand by the pledge they had given.

When this was so far arranged, the hero of the night stood forward, blunderbuss in hand, and having looked carefully at the priming, to see that all was right, he stept close up by the side of Hugh, and placing the barrel of the weapon on the shoulder of the sleeper, he paused a few moments ere he performed the somewhat dangerous feat. It was an awful moment to all concerned, and it might easily enough have been seen that every one present had made up his mind to rush out of the place on the first appearance of peril.

Presently the word was given by Ralph Dalston, and scarcely had this passed his lips, when the loud report of the blunderbuss succeeded with a noise that might have been heard at the distance of half a mile off. Upon this, away rushed the assembled spectators, tumbling over each other in the most admired disorder, and roaring out with terror, as if they already felt themselves in the hands of the two incensed giants. To add to the confusion, too, the lights had been extinguished in the scramble for precedency, and in this way they were obliged to grope their way from a place where they apprehended so much danger.

At the moment of the explosion Hugh threw out his ponderous fist against the face of his brother, who, roaring lustily with pain, started from his seat and dashed madly after the retreating fugitives, from some of whom he supposed the blow had proceeded. In fact, there is no knowing how far the enraged pair would have proceeded, had not Christopher interposed to allay their wrath, by assuring them that all the confusion had entirely arisen from a habit Hugh had of throwing his arms about in his sleep. Somewhat assured by this, they invited the dwarf to accompany them to their quarters, and then leaving the place, they proceeded grumbling and swearing towards that part of the fortress where their lodgings were situated.

CHAPTER XII.

A VISIT TO THE GIANTS DOMICILE; THE PRISONER, AND WHAT SORT OF FRIENDS HE MEETS WITH IN HIS CAPTIVITY. A PURITAN'S ZEAL, PREACHINGS, AND PRACTICES.—THE DOWNFALL OF GREATNESS.

It was a dreary looking vaulted chamber that had been set apart for the accommodation of the two warders but; a cheerful fire on the earth threw its light around upon the massive walls, and gave an air of comfort that it did not, in reality, possess. Hugh had not yet done muttering his fierce invectives against those who had so unceremoniously roused him from his slumbers, when he once more entered his domicile; and making his way towards his customary seat by the chimney corner, his foot struck against something on the ground, and on stooping his ponderous body to see what he had kicked against, he perceived the recumbent form of Richard Calcroft, the prisoner who had been arrested by Northumberland's orders for daring to raise his voice in favour of the Princess Mary. In an instant the captive was lifted up and placed on a seat, and then it became apparent that his limbs were tightly bound with cords, and that all other precautions had been taken to prevent his escape from the Tower.

"'S'blood man, what dost thou here?" exclaimed Hugh impatiently, "Who is it that hath dared to make a prison of my chamber, by giving thee a lodging here for the night?"

"I know not what you call the knave," answered the prisoner; "but he is, I believe, the gaoler of this fortress, and that piece of information I suppose will afford you the clue you want."

"Aha! this is some of Mr. Fetterlock's work is it?" exclaimed Hugh with a burst of rage that he could not repress. "But he shall suffer for this scurvy trick of his, or I am no man of my word;—he shall find to his cost that I can play as roughly as himself, and by the bones of my father, many hours shall not pass before he feels that the dog he has worried can bite as well as bark!"

"Good!" cried little Christopher, who had seated himself comfortable enough before the blazing fire; "this quarrel is a most excellent one, friend Hugh, for now that thou owest this villainous gaoler something of a grudge, perhaps I may get the revenge I have been looking out for."

"He shall rue this insult." exclaimed the warder fiercely.

"And most just it is that he should do so," continued the dwarf; "he has converted thy lodgings into a prison without permission being asked, and if this is suffered to pass unheeded he will not fail to unhouse you altogether from these snug quarters."

At this moment a deep groan came from the prisoner, and on turning their attention they saw that blood was issuing from his wrists in consequence of the tightness with which the cords had been bound round them. Hugh's compassion was excited by this unnecessary act of cruelty, and drawing forth his dagger he approached the miserable captive with the intention of releasing him from some of their galling bonds.

"Hark ye, friend," he exclaimed, "I neither know nor care whether you deserve punishment from your enemies, but it is not in my nature to see a fellow creature suffering in this way without affording assistance, and if you promise not to make any attempt to escape, I'll so far relieve you as to set your hands at liberty."

"And the condition is that I will not try to make my escape from those who seek my life?"

"Exactly so."

"Why then let me bleed on under the galling infliction of these hateful bonds," answered Richard Calcroft. "I thank you for your kindness, friend, but I dare not make a promise that I could never keep."

"Why that is honest, too," returned the giant, somewhat surprised to find so much honour under so rough an exterior; "you are a man after my own heart, friend, and by St. George 'tis a sin to see thee languish in suffering and pain when I have the means ready to give thee ease."

"Cut the cords, Hugh,—cut them, I say, or the poor fellow will bleed to death," cried the dwarf as he saw with horror the pool of gore in which the captive was sitting. "It is the duty of a Christian to relieve the oppressed, and hang me if I won't be bail for him myself, if you will only give him just so much liberty as will allow him the free use of his hands."

"Aye, aye," exclaimed Peter, with a touch of humanity; "let the poor devil have his hands free, and if anything amiss should come of it, why you and I are both big enough to take care of ourselves let who will find fault with it."

This hint was quite enough for Hugh, who, drawing his dagger across the cords, presently set the prisoner so far free as had been suggested by the compassion of his friends. This done, his lacerated wrists were well bathed with water, and when the pain had thus been somewhat assuaged by the remedy applied, he was served with a cup of liquor to recover him from the faintness occasioned by the loss of blood.

"There man," exclaimed Hugh, "that will serve to give thee heart; it is life to a man in your circumstances, and will give you strength and courage to go through the examination you will soon be called upon to undergo."

"But what if I should abuse your kindness and effect my escape from hence?"

"Why thou wouldst not attempt it, wouldst thou?"

"Liberty is too precious to be idly thrown away," replied the captive with earnestness.

"True," observed the gigantic warder, "but on the other hand escape from this place is almost impossible."

"And yet," resumed Richard Calcroft, "a desperate man will hazard much to escape from the horror of a dungeon. I have heard of the tortures with which your men in power can wring the hearts of those they would oppress, and knowing the vindictive malice of my enemies I would fain place myself as far as possible beyond their reach."

"Why, truly, there is some wisdom in that," answered the warder, "but then on the other hand, our duke hath a long arm and he would reach thee even though thou mights't take refuge before the holy altar."

"I know it—too well do I know it," replied Richard Calcroft, in a hurried manner that showed the inward workings of his soul; "but it is not for myself that I care; they would persecute and torture my aged mother; tear her limb from limb, and for no other reason than that she prefers a lawful sovereign to one who has been forced to accept a throne for the advancement of traitors.

"Stop, stop, good Mr. Prisoner," cried the dwarf;—"you are a very decent sort of a fellow, I dare say, but it would ill become us who are loyal subjects to hear Queen Jane called a usurper, and her friends traitors.

"Peace, thou little prating idiot!" exclaimed Hugh with a gesture of impatience. "Let the prisoner speak his mind freely, and see that he is not again interrupted by your foolish preaching; for my own part I care not who is queen, so that I keep my own snug birth in this old fortress, seeing that most likely the affairs of the nation will go on just as well under one woman as the other."

How much further Hugh would have gone in the exposition of his very liberal view of the matter we know not; but it is certain the dwarf was about to make an angry rejoinder to this declaration, when three solemn raps were heard at the door, and almost at the same moment the tall lanky figure of Tristrem Poundtext was seen slowly gliding into the room.

"How now, Master Parson!" exclaimed Hugh, as this unwelcome visitor made his appearance:—"what devil-dodging business has brought thee hither at this unseasonable hour of the night?"

"Restrain thy wrath, friend Hugh," drawled out the Puritan, "for lo, I am come hither on an errand of peace. I heard that a prisoner was confined here, and behold I am here to expound unto him certain portions of scripture that may lead him from the darkness of Popery to the bright road that leadeth to——"

"Nonsense!" bawled Hugh lustily.

"Vain scoffer, beware of the wrath that is to come!" vociferated

Poundtext at the top of his squeaking voice. "I am here a messenger of peace, and——"

"If you dont go in about a moment, you will find me a messenger of war!" interrupted Hugh, dashing his clenched fist upon the table, with a sound that made the Puritan jump back nearly to the door. "I am now in my own lodging, and woe be unto any canting hypocrite who comes to bother me with his threats of external damnation."

"Sinful man, hear me—

"I'll not hear a word you have got to say," again interrupted the giant. "This place is my own castle, and if you don't disappear through that door, I shall give you a bear's hug that you wont like, and, perhaps, you may find yourself at the bottom of the stairs in less time than I have taken in giving you warning of it."

"Verily thou art over rash, good Master Hugh," cried the puritan, whose zeal on the present occasion was greater than his prudence. "That thou art a stronger man than myself I deny not; nevertheless, my duty must lead me on to the good work that prompts mine attendance here."

"If you value your neck make the best of your way out of this place," suggested the dwarf, who knew the fiery temper of his friend Hugh. "You hear that we are not inclined to listen to you just now, and if once you raise the anger of Hugh, the giant, your preaching will be stopped for ever."

"Nevertheless will I essay my task of righteousness," answered the preacher. "There is a prisoner here,—a Papist as I have heard say,—and I would labour to save his soul from the perdition that is to come."

"Bah!" growled the giant, "and what business has thou to exalt thine own religion above his. Don't you both worship the same Maker, and though you may differ a little in forms, is that any reason that he is to be damned, while you get a snug place in paradise?"

"Friend Hugh," answered the puritan, "thou may'st be a very good warden, but believe me, thou art wofully abroad in thy theological notions. The scarlet woman of Babylon is abroad seeking to undo the souls of the righteous, and it behoves the elect, of which I am a most unworthy member, to destroy the power that is growing up for our destruction."

"Why thou prating fool, what canst thou tell me more than I know already?" demanded Hugh, with increasing impatience.

"Aye," chimed in the dwarf, "what indeed canst thou tell us more than we know."

"Now, Master Parson, answer that question like a man," rejoined Peter who had hitherto taken very little part in the discussion;—"what can you tell any of us more than we at present know?"

"Sinful men! you will all go to ———"

"The devil!" exclaimed Hugh, angrily interrupting the man of peace.

"Ah!" groaned Poundtext, "that is the conclusion I was just coming to;—you will all meet with the punishment you deserve, but more particularly will vengeance fall upon yonder Papist who has dared to raise his rebellious voice against Queen Jane,—whom heaven long preserve from the malice of her enemies."

"In that latter prayer we can all heartily join you," cried Hugh; "but then it don't follow that we are to condemn this poor fellow because he happens to be of a different opinion. If he is wrong he will be punished by those that have made a prisoner of him, and hang me if he's going to be rated by a mad parson when he's got quite enough to do to fight against those that have got him in their power."

"Nay, let him go on if he will," said the prisoner interposing to prevent any further ebullition of the warder's wrath. "I can listen to him with patience, but I warn him beforehand that nothing he can say will serve to alter those opinions that I have maintained throughout my life."

"Aye," answered the Puritan, "that is because thy heart is hardened against the blessed voice of truth. Thou hast listened to the voice of Satan, and art a lost sheep upon whom the wolf is even now ready to spring upon with deadly aim; yea, thy hour is well nigh come, and thou wilt fall like———"

At this moment Christopher Dumps, who was determined to have at laugh at the Puritans's expense, crept under the stool, upon which the parson was standing, and giving him a hoist up with his shoulders, he brought the unfortunate preacher to the ground with a degree of violence that threatened to break every bone in his body. Luckily, however, he escaped with only a few severe contusions, and after rubbing himself a little, he again mounted his former exalted position in order to take up the thread of his discourse which had been so abruptly broken off. This, however, Hugh was not at all inclined to allow, and jumping up he seized Poundtext round the waist and carried him to the head of the stairs, swearing at the same time roundly, that he would precipitate him from top to bottom unless he promised to take his departure without interfering any further where his presence was not required.

Whether the preacher was obstinate in his resolution to proceed, or whether, as is more likely, he was too much frightened to make any answer to his proposition we are not quite certain, but the giant seemed to think the former was the cause of his silence, and he was just going to drop his burden down the stairs when his brother and the dwarf stepped forward in behalf of the affrighted Puritan, in consequence of whose united entreaties he at last consented to let him depart in peace on condition that he promised never to disturb them again. This Master Tristrem Poundtext was but too accede to, and no sooner was he released from the grasp of his powerful opponent, than, making the best use of his legs, he scrambled down four stairs at a time, and upon reaching the court-yard congratulated himself upon the escape he had from the gigantic warder.

As for Hugh and his companions, they heartily enjoyed the alarm of the poor fellow that had been dismissed in so summary a manner, and they were just about to sit down and enjoy themselves over a tankard of ale, when the door once more opened, and Dame Dalstone pale and disordered, rushed into the room. In few and hurried words she informed them Sybilla had suddenly disappeared, and as she had last been seen in a distant part of the fortress the most painful suspicions began to be entertained that some misfortune had occurred to prevent her return home. In addition to this, it was known that she had lately been engaged in a severe altercation with Martin Fetterlock, and as his vindictive disposition was well known there was but too much reason to fear that he might have murdered her in revenge for the coldness with which she had received his addresses. Hugh and his companions would fain have argued her out of this notion, but she was resolved to maintain her opinion, and in the end, the good-natured warder offered to go in search of the lost maiden, and if possible, restore her once more to her home. This was no sooner proposed than preparations were made to put the project into immediate execution, and leaving Dame Dalstone at her own door, he set forth on the errand he had thus taken upon himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW MARTIN FETTERLOCK FANCIED HE SAW A GHOST.—THE MAIDEN AND THE RUFFIAN.—SYBILLA'S MIDNIGHT INTERVIEW AND THE SUSPICION TO WHICH THAT CIRCUMSTANCE GIVES RISE.—THE SECRET CAVERN AND THE SPRING LOCK.

We must now follow Martin Fetterlock at the moment he left the warder and the dwarf as we mentioned a chapter or two back. Enraged at the charges that had been brought against him, the gaoler hurried along by the ramparts, and then turning suddenly to the left he passed through a low gateway, and crossing the Tower Green made the best of his way towards the place where the dungeon was situated in which he had immured the unfortunate Gilbert Hemmingsley. As he hurried on, muttering through his closed teeth at the suspicions to which he was subjected, he was somewhat startled at perceiving a figure in white slowly moving before him, and gliding with spectre-like movements in the deep shadow of the high buildings to the eastward. Guilty as he was, Martin Fetterlock at once suspected that this was some tenant of the tomb come to upbraid him with former crimes, and pausing for an instant or two, he seemed irresolute whether to proceed on his errand or return home and defer his visit till the following morning. While he was thus undecided, however, the figure approached the spot where he was standing, and then stepping aside into a recess, he resolved to conceal himself there until he could satisfy his mind whether his worst fears were well grounded or not. At this moment the moon suddenly appeared from behind a cloud which had hitherto obscured its glory, and falling upon the figure before him, he recognized in the form the well-known features of the gentle Sybilla. This was a gratification that he had not expected, and rushing suddenly from his place of concealment, he seized her arm just as she was about to run homewards, in consequence of the footsteps she had heard following her.

"'Fore heaven!" he exclaimed, "but this is a meeting as welcome as it is unexpected. Nay, struggle not to release yourself from me, Sybilla, for I have something I would say to you, which cannot be deferred beyond the present moment."

"Villain, forbear!" cried Sybilla, struggling to disengage herself from his firm grasp; "release me, or my cries shall bring those who will not fail to punish the coward who thus oppresses the helpless with his loathed presence."

"Aye, that is it,—that is it!" muttered the gaoler fiercely; I am loathed as you say,—and for whom but one who it is in my power to crush."

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Of Gilbert Hemmingsley—of my hated rival, to whom I owe the loss of all I hold most dear."

"Nay, you never loved me, or you would not thus come to terrify with words of fear," cried Sybilla almost sinking to the earth with alarm; "leave me, Master Fetterlock, and thus prove your sincerity by breaking off an interview that fills me with apprehension."

"Leave you!" he exclaimed wildly; "and would you have me weakly lose an opportunity I so much wished for, and yet scarcely dared to expect, would be so soon gratified. I want to tell you that you are now standing upon the verge of a fearful precipice, and to warn you that Gilbert Hemmingsley shall not live to be my rival in your love."

"Who has told thee that he loved me?" asked the maiden, shrinking beneath the fierce glance of her persecutor.

"My own observation has convinced me of it," answered Fetterlock; "nay, I overheard your brief conversation this day, in which he declared the passion with which your beauty had inspired his heart; you, Sy illa, rejected not his suit, but rather listened to him, as if in encouragement."

"And even if I did," exclaimed the maiden proudly, "I have yet to learn that my actions are to be controlled by one who has often heard me declare how much I detest and abhor his insolent addresses."

"Aye, 'tis well to carry it with a high head," cried Martin Fetterlock, with a contemptuous sneer; you have ever treated me with scorn, proud girl, but the time is now past that your haughty indifference can be borne with, and I now tell thee, once for all, that the squire, Gilbert Hemmingsley, can never be thine."

"Be that as it may, I will never give my hand to thee," answered Sybilla; "from the first I have told thee that thy suit was all in vain; that my heart never could be thine; and that I would never wed where my love could not be wholly and entirely fixed."

"We shall see that, girl," exclaimed Fetterlock sullenly. "Your adopted father, Ralph Dalston, has encouraged me to persevere, and it may be that by-and-bye you will be forced to the altar with the man you now affect to despise."

"Martin Fetterlock," cried Sybilla, collecting all her energies to give force to her words, "this is not the first time you have dared to threaten me with a forced marriage. You have repeated the boastful words, and I now defy you to force an unwilling assent from my lips, even though you may succeed in dragging me to the altar's steps."

"But thou hast none to aid thee in thine obstinacy, proud girl," exclaimed the ruffian with a malignant smile.

"None that you know of at present," answered Sybilla, "but be assured heaven will not desert me whenever the hour of tribulation shall arive."

"Say rather that you expect assistance from your doughty champion, Master Gilbert Hemmingsley," sneered the gaoler. "He is a gallant youth, I doubt not, but I have little to fear from his interference."

"Ah!" cried Sybilla with alarm, "you speak in a tone of exultation that convinces me some foul practices have been resorted to. Gilbert Hemmingsley has been missed for the last three or four hours, and if my fears deceive me not, you have taken means to get him out of the way!"

"Psha! I have been spared that trouble," answered Fetterlock with cold indifference; "Gilbert Hemmingsley, for reasons best known to himself, has thought proper to quit the Tower under cover of the night."

"Nay, there thou hast betrayed thyself," cried Sybilla. "His Grace of Northumberland has given orders that no person shall be suffered to quite the place without a written order under his own sign manual."

"Nevertheless, I have told you the truth," exclaimed the ruffian. "My rival found means to swim across the moat, and is doubtless, by this time, pouring out the full torrent of his love in the ears of some damsel more favoured than yourself."

Sybilla was petrified at this announcement of the artful ruffian, and it was some few minutes ere she could find words to reply. It was

impossible however to deny the assertion made by her tormentor, and bursting into a violent flood of tears, she implored him to say whether it was indeed true that the youth had quitted the service of his noble employer in the way he had stated.

"Why, of course, I have spoken the truth," replied Fetterlock, triumphing in the misery his falsehood had occasioned: "You have yourself heard that the youth is missing, and I now tell you the manner in which he effected his escape from the Tower. But come, girl, dry up thy tears and smile upon one, who, whatever his faults may be, will never prove a traitor to his sworn vows of love.

"Leave me!" cried Sybilla, peremptorily snatching away the fair hand he was about to press to his lips;—"let me go my ways, Martin Fetterlock, for my heart is too full at present, and I would seek the solitude of my own chamber."

"Promise to give me another interview to-morrow night, and I will no longer oppose your departure."

"Nay, I will give no pledge of the kind," answered Sybilla; "you have already received my definitive answer upon a subject that is most painful to me, and no power on earth can ever change the feeling of intense dislike with which I must still regard you."

"And this is because you prefer the attentions of a coxcomb to those of one of no greater pretensions than myself," exclaimed Martin Fetterlock. "But it matters not, for my own triumph will not be long delayed. You will yet find that this gaudy court butterfly professes love only that he may make the more sure of his victim, and then by-and-bye he will cast her from him with scorn, that has been created by her own credulity and folly," "Your own malignity is the only foundation for these most unjust anticipations," cried Sybilla. "He whom you traduce in the very soul of honour, and I may yet live to see the day when his actions will give a direct falsehood to the infamous charges you would bring against him."

"On my conscience, the youth has a zealous advocate to defend his honour," exclaimed Martin Fetterlock.

"Aye, and much he needs one, when a villain is to be found to stab him thus in the dark!" cried the maiden.

"Dost thou think me the villain thou hast said?" exclaimed the gaoler, grasping her arm with ferocious violence.

"Help! help!" screamed Sybilla, writhing under the torture inflicted by the monster.

"Nay, another word, and this dagger's point shall find its way to your heart," muttered the ruffian in her ear. "Rouse but one friend to come hither to thy aid, and thou fallest as surely as you now gaze upon yonder heaven."

"Let me go, then, and I promise never to tell of this interview," cried Sybilla, writhing with the pain he had inflicted. "Suffer me to return home and all shall be kept secret."

"Thy safety depend upon thine own prudence," exclaimed the other releasing her arm;—"I give thee thy liberty, girl, but remember, thy life is in my hands, and it becomes forfeited the moment you seek to ruin me by relating what has passed between us this night. Thy lover too, this same Gilbert Hemmingsley, must be forgotten; from this time thou must never see him more, and his death as well as thine may be the consequence.

"Am I to be governed then by thee!" cried Sybilla in a tone of scorn; "are my actions to be under thy control, that thou darest thus to lay down rules which I am not inclined to obey."

"Thou must either obey them or involve thy young squire in perils that he will find it difficult to avoid. He is in my power, girl, and with that advantage in my favour have a right to demand thy acquiescence."

"Alas!" sighed the maiden, "I fear he is more in thy power than thou art willing to confess. The story thou hast told me of his escape, is but a fiction to secure thine own base purposes, and he whom thou dreadest as a rival, is perhaps a prisoner under thy cruel guardianship."

"Hah! hast thou any reason for such a suspicion?" asked Martin Fetterlock anxiously, for his own guilty conscience assured him that his villany was not so secret as he had imagined; "thou hast hinted, girl, that thy lover is a prisoner in the Tower;—now, answer me truly,—hast thou heard that such a thing is thought of by any person in this place besides thyself?"

"I have not."

"'Tis well,—then now let me assure thee that the suspicion is unfounded," resumed the gaoler. "The youth, as I told thee, has left the fortress, though for what reason I do not profess to know, and by this time he is, doubtless, far enough off from those who may endeavour to trace the place of his flight."

"'Tis false!" cried Sybilla, "Gilbert Hemmingsley must have had a motive to have induced him to leave the service of his noble master in the way thou has said, and as I spoke to him within half an hour of the time when he was first missed, I can declare that he was then preparing to wait upon the Duke of Northumberland in the Council Chamber."

"And upon thy evidence I am to be convicted of falsehood?"

"Thou wilt!"

"And you would speak the word that would ruin me?"

"Aye, if it were to do justice to another."

Martin Fetterlock paused in deep rumination; by the deep heaving of his chest it was evident that thoughts of darkness occupied his mind, and every now and then he half plucked forth his dagger as if he would have buried it in the bosom of the helpless girl before him. Presently, however, he with a violent effort shook off the sombre mood into which he had fallen, and affecting an air of the most perfect indifference he said:—

"I can easily pardon your suspicions, girl, for it is only natural that you should conceive my story an improbable one. Yet that it is true I give you my word, and therefore do I entreat you to withhold any suspicions you may have formed against me, until circumstances shall arise to prove that I am not the villain you have imagined."

"Be it so," answered Sybilla after a moment's pause; "but, remember, I shall henceforth watch your actions most narrowly, and if I find cause to believe that my suspicions are well founded I shall not hesitate to denounce you for the monster I have described. Leave me, therefore, Martin Fetterlock, and for the future let our meetings be as few as circumstances will allow."

"But we part as friends, I hope?"

"Aye, as much so as you can expect."

"And you will not mention the interview that has this night taken place between us?"

"Not unless their should be urgent occasion for it."

"'Tis well, you are now at liberty to depart—farewell, and see that you keep your promise faithfully."

Glad to escape, Sybilla now moved quickly from the spot, but scarcely had she proceeded across the square, when a sudden thought struck her that it was likely Martin Fetterlock was about to visit his prisoner. This idea arrested her steps, and turning round she beheld the gaoler stealing along under the shadow of the buildings towards a part of the fortress where she knew several of the secret dungeons were situated. Prompted by an earnest wish to discover the cause of all this caution, she followed at a sufficient distance behind, until she saw him pause before the heavy portal of an antique structure, which she well knew led to some of the subterranean caverns of which she had so frequently heard. Concealing herself behind a buttress she saw him cautiously enter the passage to which the door gave access, and scarcely had he proceeded a hundred yards when she herself followed him into the same gloomy recess. Here she paused a few moments, to reflect whether she should follow him any further or not, and scarcely had she made up her mind to return, when the door was swung to by the wind, and securely fastened upon her by means of a spring lock.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH ARE DETAILED SOME PARTICULARS CONCERNING GILBERT HEMMINGSLEY.—AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN THE GAOLER AND HIS CAPTIVES.—THE DEATH STRUGGLE.

When Gilbert Hemmingsley was seized in the manner we have described in a former chapter, he was so completely stupified by the suddenness with which he had been attacked, that it was some time afterwards before he could make any attempt to rescue himself from the hands which had been thus unwarrantably laid upon him. At last, he became conscious that he was being dragged rapidly away, and then making one desperate effort, he succeeded in partially removing the cloak in which his head had been muffled, and raising a feeble cry for assistance. But this was instantly suppressed by a heavy blow that rendered him insensible, and in this helpless condition he was carried through innumerable dark passages to the frowning portal that was soon to close upon him as a prisoner. Here the principal of the two persons who had him in charge dismissed his comrade, and then raising the captive in his arms, he bore him to a dreary dungeon in a remote part of the fortress. Here, upon a heap of loathsome straw he laid down his still unconscious burden, and then quitting the place for a few minutes, he returned with a pitcher of water and some black bread, which he placed so as to be within the reach of the prisoner. This done, he next, by the faint light of a lamp which he had provided himself, fastened a chain round the body of Gilbert, and having secured him to the wall, he stood for some few minutes gazing upon him with a look in which malice and fiendish satisfaction were equally blended.

"So," he exclaimed triumphantly, "I have now completed my task; my rival is in my power, and it will go hard indeed if ever he again thrusts himself in my path to thwart the designs upon which my soul is fixed. Secure in this place, I can defy the most rigid search of his friends; in vain, will they look for him, for though they may hunt for him through every other part of the building, yet will this one dungeon defy their utmost pains. The place is known only to myself, and even the most dreadful tortures that man's ingenuity can invent, shall never wrench from me the secret upon which my own hopes of future success depend; he is mine, and nothing but his own oath to yield up the girl to me shall ever release him from my power!"

With these words Martin Fetterlock took up the lamp and was about to leave the dungeon, when a slight rustling of the straw announced that the unfortunate captive was just recovering from the stupor into which he had been thrown. Upon this, the gaoler retraced his steps, and throwing the light of his lamp full upon the countenance of the unhappy youth, he stood gazing upon him with a look of the most vindictive triumph. During this brief interval Gilbert Hemmingsley recovered himself sufficiently to start upon his feet, but the chain that encircled his body restrained him within the narrow sphere to which he was confined, and uttering a cry of horror, he sank once more on the filthy heap which now afforded him his only bed.

"Peace, bawling idiot!" muttered Fetterlock between his clenched teeth; "speak not above thy breath, or what thou now sufferest is but a trifle to that thou wilt presently be made to endure!"

"Merciful heaven, what is the meaning of this!" groaned Gilbert, with a feeling of intense agony.

"It means that you are thrown into the power of your bitterest enemy," answered the gaoler; that you are my prisoner, and that never will you see the blessed light of day till you have promised to yield to my wishes."

"Villain!" groaned the captive, "and by what authority do you dare to throw me in this filthy dungeon?"

"Nay, ask me not for my authortty," answered Fetterlock, "for that can matter but little, seeing that thou art beyond the reach of all who might befriend thee. Here thy cries can never be heard, nor canst thou ever hope for release until thou hast yielded to whatever demands I may think proper to insist upon."

"Am I become thy slave then?" exclaimed Gilbert, "that one so base as thou shalt dare to dictate to me the terms of my deliverance?"

"Thou see'st thy helpless situation," returned the wretch, "and, therefore, thou canst best judge whether thou or I shall conquer in this case. This place is known to no one but myself; thy cries can never reach the ears of mortal man, and bound as thou art with that ponderous chain, there is but little chance that you will escape until I choose to give thee a deliverance from what must otherwise prove a perpetual imprisonment."

"And what are the conditions thou would'st impose?" asked Gilbert, hardly able to suppress his furious rage.

"In the first place thou must yield up the maiden Sybilla to him who has long sought her hand," answered the ruffian; "aye, thou may'st scowl upon me, Sir Squire, but time and sufferings will, I dare say, at last bring thee to thy senses."

"And what will be the consequence of a refusal?"

"Perpetual imprisonment within these dreary walls."

"Wretch! thy crime will be discovered, and I shall be released sooner than thou dost expect."

"Of that there is little fear," replied the gaoler doggedly; "and even if there was any fear of it, my dagger would speedily ease me of any apprehension on that head."

"Thou would'st add murder to thy other crimes!"

"Aye, if there was need for it," answered Fetterlock. "My own life or thine would be in the balance, and there are few men who would hesitate in such a strait as that."

"Then," exclaimed Gilbert firmly, "once for all I here declare my resolution to endure any punishment thy malice can invent, rather than yield to thee a maiden who can never regard thee with any other feeling save that of a fixed and immoveable disgust."

"Again I warn thee that thou must do as I have said," replied the gaoler; "nay more—thou shalt not only yield up the girl to me, but thou must take a solemn oath never to say aught that may hereafter involve me in trouble for the part I have now played in order to secure my prize."

"If that is thine only errand here thou may'st leave me," exclaimed Gilbert Hemmingsley with animation. "I can endure imprisonment, pain, torture—all, for the sake of her whom thou would'st make thine unwilling bride. Thou hast bound me within this loathsome dungeon, Martin Fetterlock, but my soul is yet free, and I spurn thee even as I would the filthy reptiles with which the place abounds."

"Truly thou art marvellously brave, Master Gilbert," returned the gaoler in a tone of irony, "and yet methinks time and repentance, together with the discipline thou wilt receive in this place, will ere long bring thee to a different way of thinking. Here thou wilt be cherished by no visitors save myself;—the voice of mankind will be hushed to thee for ever, if thou remainest obstinate, and yet further to add to thy misery, thou shall linger on in the miserable certainty that she thou hast dared to love is the bride of thy inexorable gaoler."

"Nay, never shall thou possess her," answered Gilbert, rushing forward to the full extent of his chain and seizing Martin Fetterlock by the throat;—"Thou hast urged me on to madness, and now take the reward thy villainy hath so justly merited!"

Desperate was the struggle that now ensued between the captive and his vindictive enemy;—grasping each other firmly, they wrestled together as if for life or death, and in the midst of this fearful contest the lamp fell from the stone seat on which it had been placed, and instantly the dungeon was involved in utter darkness. Still, however, the two combatants continued to grasp each other with the fearful rage of two mastiffs. Over and over they rolled together on the ground, whilst curses and imprecations added to the horror of the scene. Gilbert Hemmingsley, it is true, was the weakest of the two, but his wrath had been roused to the highest state of excitement, and he maintained his hold upon the throat of his adversary, with a tenacity from which the other found it impossible to extricate himself. In vain, he tried to get possession of his dagger, for Gilbert guessed his intention, and on each occasion when the attempt was made he frustrated him by grasping yet tighter at his throat, and thus obliging him to raise his hands to save himself from instant strangulation. At last, however, with a desperate effort he contrived to release his throat from the clutch in which he was held, and then plucking forth his poinard, he was about to plunge it into the body of his rival, when the other seizing hold of the uplifted arm, wrenched away the instrument of death, and hurled it with all his strength to the further end of the dungeon. This done, he again grappled with his almost exhausted antagonist, and after some time succeeded in throwing him heavily to the earth;—again they rolled over and over each other to obtain the mastery; but at length victory declared in favour of Gilbert, and kneeling with all his might upon the prostrate form of his deadly foe, he exclaimed:—

"Now, Martin Fetterlock, the chance is mine;—you are in my power, and never shall my hand relax its grasp upon your throat until you have promised to give that freedom of which you have unjustly sought to deprive me.—Answer me, slave—shall I go home without interruption?"

"You shall,—you shall," gasped Fetterlock with difficulty;—"let me go, good Master Gilbert, and I promise whatever you think proper to demand."

"Shall I have my liberty, base caitiff?"

"Yes, yes, I promise you shall."

"And will you ever dare to whisper your love in the ear of the fair Sybilla?"

"She shall be yours,—she shall be yours."

"And what certainty have I that this extorted promise will be faithfully observed?" asked the squire.

"You have my word for it," cried the gaoler in his extreme terror of death;—"grant but my life and my future services and gratitude shall be at your command."

"Then rise," exclaimed Gilbert relaxing his hold, and has he did so the gaoler sprung upon his feet, uttering a wild laugh of mingled exultation and derision.

"Ha! ah! ah!" he shouted, "I am free again;—the terror of death no longer encompasses me, and it is now my turn to exact terms and promises."

"Villain!—do you so soon forget your oath?"

"I do," answered Fetterlock, "for it was extorted from me by violence, and now that I am no longer at your mercy, I once more resume my former advantage over you. This is your lodging for the future, Gilbert Hemmingsley, and never shall you quit the dreary place of your imprisonment, until I have secured the maiden you would have robbed me of."

Enraged at the perfidy of Martin Fetterlock, the squire would have again grappled with him, but the other seemed to be aware of his design, and stepping on one side he avoided a fate, which had he again fallen into the hands of his antagonist, would have been inevitable. Dark as it was, however, Gilbert missed the object of his wrath, and kicking violently against a stone, he fell prostrate at the feet of his implacable foe. It was now the gaoler's turn for exultation, and again giving utterance to a demoniac laugh, he exclaimed as he placed his foot firmly upon the neck of his fallen enemy :—

" Now Gilbert Hemmingsley, it is thy turn to beg for life ; thou art at my mercy, and I can slay thee as I would the treacherous serpent whose deadly aim against my life I had chanced to defeat."

" Kill me then !" cried Gilbert passionately ;—" in mercy kill me that I may no longer bear the cruel tortures thou oulds't inflict upon a powerless enemy."

" Nay, that would be depriving me of the deep revenge I contemplate," answered Fetterlock in an accent of insulting triumph. " Thou shalt live, Gilbert Hemmingsley, but only that I may daily enjoy the satisfaction of listening to thy groans and lamentations. Here thou shalt dwell alone in misery, and thy only visitor shall be the foe whose chief satisfaction will consist in torturing thee with his presence."

" Fiend ! inexorable fiend."

" Aye, rail on me as thou wilt, for I can bear thy puny rage with calmness," answered Martin Fetterlock with savage coldness. " Call me what thou wilt for I can endure all with patience whilst I know that thou art rendered harmless in thy prison."

" By heaven thou shalt not long exult over me," exclaimed the squire with trembling earnestness. " Thou canst not force me to live, and ere many hours are past thou shall find me deaf alike to thine insults and thy triumphs."

" Fool !" muttered the gaoler, " thou forgettest that thou art unarmed, and that thy body is secured to the wall by a chain that will bid defiance to all thy puny efforts to release thyself."

" And thou forgettest what despair may urge me to," exclaimed Gilbert ; " In my madness I may dash out my brains against the walls of my dungeon."

" Psha ! thou wilt scarce have the courage to release thyself by a death so horrible."

" I dare encounter anything rather than live to witness the complete extinction of all my hopes," answered Gilbert. " Nay, I will refuse to taste the scanty pittance of food you my think fit to supply me with, and thus will you be deprived of a revenge your guilty soul yearns for."

" Thou art a vain boaster, and there is little fear of my being cheated of revenge by so insane an act," exclaimed Martin Fetterlock, with an expression of scorn that he sought not to conceal. " Thou wilt live if it is only in the hope that some lucky chance may some time or other befriend thee, and aid thee to escape from this dungeon ; verily, master Hemmingsley, there are few who would destroy themselves until every hope is entirely extinguished."

" And have you not but just now told me that I should never leave this place alive ?"

" I have ; but ask thine own heart whether thou dost not believe that there is yet a chance of release, even in spite of the bonds that are upon thee. Thou wilt strive hard to effect thy escape, even though the probabilities against it were tenfold."

"And if I did escape," replied Gilbert, "my first act should be to heap vengeance on the head of him who has thus sought the destruction of my happiness."

"Oh, thy boasting is all in vain," answered the gaoler, "and therefore do I leave thee for the present, while I go to fetch thee the food that is to prolong thy miserable existence. Farewell, then, Sir Squire, for the present, and when I return, show me by thy resignation, that thou hast not yet quite abandoned thy manhood."

Having said this, Master Fetterlock groped his way towards the door and presently afterwards, the wretched captive heard the clanking of heavy chains, as the ruffian took the precaution of securing the door so as to prevent the possibility of his prisoner escaping from the dungeon. Agonised by a thousand conflicting thoughts, Gilbert Hemmingsley threw himself upon the heap of straw which was now his only bed, and giving free vent to the excruciating feelings with which he was tormented, he called upon death to release him from sufferings that were too great to be longer borne. In the midst of his despair, however, he was startled by a slight touch on the arm, and raising his head, he beheld leaning over him an aged female, who, with the aid of a lamp which she held in her hand, was gazing in his countenance with a look that denoted the extreme mental torture with which she was racked. Gilbert was horrified as this vision caught his sight, for, in the first alarm with which he was seized, he almost fancied that he had been visited by some supernatural being who came to warn him of some terrible doom. Starting, therefore, upon his feet, he retreated as far as his chain would allow, and then covering his face with his hands, he exclaimed,—

"Wherefore dost thou come to visit me in this lonely place of captivity; if it be to tell me that the hour of death draws nigh, speak thy prediction quickly, for I care not how soon I find oblivion from the woes that have fallen upon me!"

"Alas!" cried the old woman, "thou art not he for whom I was searching; I came to find my son, and again am I doomed to the pangs of disappointment. Ah me! there is nothing but woe in this world for poor Mable Calcroft."

"Mable Calcroft," exclaimed Gilbert; "then in you I behold the woman who warned Queen Jane of the perils that threatened her."

"I did," replied the old woman, "and believe me, nothing but my fears for her safety would have induced me to run the risk of death from her servile flatterers."

"But you seem to prognosticate dangers that her friends deem impossible."

"I have foretold nothing but what will and must happen, if she persists in maintaining possession of a crown that does not lawfully belong to her," answered Mabel. "If she has a few friends her enemies are more numerous than you perhaps imagine, and depend upon it the time is not far distant when, fair and beauteous as she is, she will be made to suffer heavily for the wicked ambition of those who have madly exalted her to the throne. She is devoted to a dreadful death, and if I was presumptuous in warning her against peril it was done to save her from destruction.

"Peace, I charge thee, peace," cried Gilbert impatiently. "These are but the outpourings of a mind diseased, and it would ill beseem me to listen to words so treasonable towards the sovereign I have sworn to protect with my life."

"And how thinkest thou to protect her chained and imprisoned as thou art?" demanded the old woman.

"True," replied the squire despondingly, "in the warmth of my loyalty I had forgotten the straits to which I have been reduced through the perfidy of my enemies. And yet," he continued with sudden animation, "thou hast found means to enter my dungeon, and could I but relieve myself from the chains that bind my limbs, I might yet again breathe the air of liberty of which the artifice of a foe has deprived me."

"The chain is thick and not easily to be removed," exclaimed Mabel examining it earnestly, by means of the lamp she held in her hand. "Yet, could this be removed, there is a way by which escape would be easy."

"How did'st thou gain access to me?" asked Gilbert; "I heard my gaoler fasten the door after him, and scarcely had he gone, when thou wert standing in my presence."

"Chance directed me hither," replied Mable Calthorpe, "and when I beheld thee lying upon thy straw bed, I believed that the object of my visit had been accomplished."

"Who was't thou searching for?" asked the squire.

"For my son," answered the old woman wildly; "they have torn him from me, and I fear the malice of his enemies will never be satisfied till they have sacrificed him to their vindictive wrath."

"I remember," cried Gilbert Hemmingsley; "the youth you speak of was imprudent enough to raise his voice in favour of the Princess Mary, and being arrested by some of the Queen's officers, he has been brought here to await the sentence of the Duke of Northumberland."

"Aye, and they will have his blood unless I can find means to liberate him from their grasp," exclaimed Mable. "It was to search for him that I came forth to-night, and after wandering through numerous cells and caverns, I, at length, found a wall where a small hole had been formed by the dilapidating hand of time. Through that aperture I crept and instantly found myself in the place where I now stand. Perceiving a figure lying upon the ground, I stooped in the hope of recognising the features of my boy; but judge my disappointment when I discovered that thou wert the captive, and that all my labours have been thus thrown away."

"Then thou wilt leave me to perish here!" cried Gilbert.

"What can I do for thee?" asked the female; "thou art bound by thy foes, and it would take a stronger arm than mine to release thee from the chain that fastens thee to the wall."

"True, true," answered the squire despondingly; "I had forgotten how hopeless is my condition, and that I must remain here at the mercy of him who has entrapped me. But hush! my gaoler returns —speed from this place I charge thee, and if an opportunity should offer, forget not, I pray thee, the helpless prisoner whose life hangs upon the humour of a crafty villain."

Mable replied not, but pressing the hand of the youth, she snatched up the lamp and hastily quitted the dungeon by the same narrow aperture that had given her admittance. Almost at the same moment, Fetterlock made his appearance, and advancing towards the captive, he exclaimed harshly:—

"Whose voice was that I heard just now in converse with thee; nay, deny it not, for my ears have not deceived me, and I *will* know the truth."

"By what right am I thus questioned?" demanded Gilbert haughtily.

"By the right which the strong have over the weak," answered the gaoler. "I can torture thee in any way I please—aye, and will do so unless you instantly release my suspense by confessing the whole truth; say—who was it that just now parted from thee?"

"A woman!"

"Humph!—I thought as much; and she spoke to thee of her child?—am I not right, Sir Squire?"

"Truly, you have guessed marvellously well," exclaimed Gilbert, "she did speak to me of her child, the loss of whom, it appears, has deprived her almost of her reason."

"Would that it had deprived her of life!" exclaimed Martin Fetterlock, "that woman is a very serpent in my path, and yet she lives on as if to be a curse to me."

"And yet," observed the captive, "I should suppose she has not been here very long."

"You are mistaken,—she has been here some years."

Gilbert now saw that some mistake had been made, but as he was in hopes the gaoler would yet further disclose his secret, he merely replied:—

"Of course, I made no enquiries into an affair that concerned me not: the poor maniac spoke of her child, and pitying her sufferings I allowed her to proceed without interruption."

"She told thee, then," exclaimed Fetterlock, "that the child, the fair daughter of whom she spoke, was born within one of the dungeons of this fortress?"

Anxious to hear the secret, and fearful of putting the gaoler on his guard if he ventured to answer, Gilbert bowed his head in token of acquiescence, and Martin Fetterlock proceeded:—

"She whom you just saw was brought hither many years ago a state prisoner;—the crime with which she was charged I shall not explain, but it is sufficient to say that she gave birth to a female infant shortly after her arrival here, and that the policy of her enemies rendered it necessary that the child should be removed from her almost as soon as it came into the world."

"I see," exclaimed Gilbert, "you were found to be a ready tool for any act of infamy, and the poor babe was murdered to satisfy the malice of those fiends who had persecuted the hapless mother?"

"That is a part of my secret that I am not at liberty to explain," answered the gaoler, who was glad to find that Gilbert was so far in the dark with respect to this mysterious affair.

"At least you can tell me who the mother was?"

"I am sworn to secrecy," answered the gaoler, "and yet, I know not that it matters much seeing that your own doom is sealed, and that you must die to night."

"Ha! so soon!" exclaimed Gilbert, startled by this sudden announcement; "do my enemies thirst so greedily for my blood that I must be murdered without a trial?"

"I have said it," replied the other, "and nothing on earth can reverse your doom, unless you consent to abandon all your vain pretensions to the love of Sybilla."

"Never," cried the youth, "rather would I perish by the most horrible tortures than consent to yield up one who is more precious to me than all the world contains beside."

"Fool!" muttered Fetterlock, "and what good can thine obstinacy do thee? Ere two hours shall have elapsed, thou wilt have fallen beneath the heads-mans axe, and the maiden you so obstinately persist in loving will be mine."

"Never!" exclaimed Sybilla, who at that moment rushed into the dungeon, and throwing herself between the gaoler and his captive, she looked sternly upon the former, who shrank back aghast beneath the almost supernatural glare of her eye. It was some few seconds before Fetterlock could recover from the surprise into which her unexpected appearance had thrown him, but at length, collecting his scattered thoughts, he asked in a tremulous voice how she came there?

"I came to watch one whose soul, I know, is ever bent on mischief," answered Sybilla firmly. "Stealthily following your footsteps, I ventured within the portal that gives admittance to this place from the court-yard; as you strode onwards I was left in darkness, and, terrified at the situation I found myself in, I would have retreated from the place; but here my intentions were frustrated—the door had closed with a spring, and then—rendered desperate by my situation, I followed you to the door of this cell, where I overheard the conversation that passed between you and your prisoner."

"Hah! did you hear all?" demanded Fetterlock with alarm.

"Not all," replied the maiden.

"Then my secret is still safe," exclaimed the gaoler in a tone of exultation. "All is secure, and I yet possess the power of life and death over my captive rival."

"What mean your words, Martin Fetterlock?" cried Sybilla, with frantic terror; "what of Gilbert?—surely, surely,—black as your heart is, you would not sacrifice him because he stands between you and one who has sworn never to be yours."

"Nay, you can both do as you please," answered the other with forced composure; "the warrant for Gilbert Hemmingsley's death is signed, and the executioner waits his victim with impatience."

"Merciful heaven! can this be true!" shrieked Sybilla with fearful vehemence. "Are his enemies,—are you, Martin Fetterlock, so base and cowardly as to hurry him to an ignominous death because he stands in your way as a rival? Villain! I have known thee for a crawling, abject wretch, without pity—without remorse—yet never did I believe thou would'st be guilty of so cold blooded a murder!"

"Peace Sybilla, I pray thee," cried Gilbert; "he is resolved to crush his rival, and I would rather perish than live to see thee become the bride of so vile a caitiff."

"Is there no way by which his life may be spared?" exclaimed the maiden, addressing herself to Fetterlock, and disregarding the words of her captive lover; "say, is there any device by which to rescue the prisoner from death?"

"There is," replied Martin Fetterlock; "consent to become the wife of the man you have so long rejected with scorn, and he shall be at liberty an hour after the nuptial ceremony has been performed."

"It is a cruel condition," answered Sybilla after a brief pause, during which she struggled against the feeling of hatred with which she regarded Fetterlock; "it is hard to unite myself for life to the man I loath as I do thee, and yet the blood of Gilbert Hemmingsley must be spared let the sacrifice be what it may."

"You consent then?" exclaimed the gaoler with a grim look of satisfaction; "you accede to my offer, and to-morrow will witness our union at the altar of St. Peter's chapel?"

"It shall."

"Nay," cried Gilbert interposing, "this must not be, dearest Sybilla; my worthless life would be dearly purchased at so great a price, and never will I consent to accept the terms upon which he has offered me liberty."

"He is mad, and his words utterly worthless," exclaimed Martin Fetterlock, who began to fear lest the advantage he had gained should be once more destroyed. "I tell thee, Sybilla, I hold the warrant for his execution this very night;—nay, thou sees't it in my hand,—and so surely as you reject the terms we have just agreed to, so surely will to-morrow's sun rise upon his headless, bloody corse!"

"This is some trick to deceive us," cried Gilbert earnestly— "I have had no trial, neither is there any one who would seek to destroy me as this monster has declared."

"Be not too sure of that," exclaimed Martin Fetterlock with a demoniacal expression of triumph. "You have enemies in the Council, a charge of treason has been brought against you;—witnesses have been examined, and upon their evidence this warrant for your death has been signed. Nay more, the executioner has received orders to despatch you this night, and even now he waits for his victim with the impatience that a hungry tiger crouches in his covert to spring upon his expected prey. Now Sybilla, you have heard the peril that awaits my rival, and it only remains for you to declare whether he shall live or die."

"Do you promise him liberty as well as life?" demanded the maiden with trembling anxiety.

"Both," answered the gaoler; "I am acquainted with a subterranean passage that leads to the outside of the ditch that surrounds the Tower walls, and as surely as I live, so surely shall he be placed beyond the reach of danger immediately after I have received your vows at the altar."

"It shall be done, then," said the maiden in a voice almost choked with emotion.

"Nay, I implore—command you to retract your words." cried Gilbert Hemmingsley with an earnestness that he could not control; "my life is valueless in comparison with your future happiness, and gladly will I lay down my life to save thee from the hands of this villain."

"Bah!"—growled Fetterlock, "and what good would your death do her? she must still be mine, and I triumph in spite of any obstacles that may be raised against me. Have not her friends consented to our union, and shall I yield up my prize because a foolish girl chooses to treat me with scorn and contempt?"

"Again I implore her not to heed your words," cried Gilbert earnestly.

"The sacrifice must be made," exclaimed Sybilla, "even though my heart breaks in the conflict. To see you at liberty, I would cheerfully give up my own, and since your oppressor demands my hand, I will give it him on condition that you are immediately released from this dreadful captivity."

"It shall be done," muttered Fetterlock, "but ere I give you my solemn vows at the altar you must bring me some token that your word has been faithfully kept."

"I pledge myself to do so, fair Sybilla."

"Enough," replied the heroic maiden, "and now I would that you leave us for a short time while I arrange with Gilbert Hemmingsley what the token shall consist of."

Martin Fetterlock retired to the further end of the cell, and folding his arms across his bosom, he listened intently so as to gather as much as he could of the suppressed conversation that was passing between the lovers.

"And now, Sybilla," said Gilbert, in a voice so low as not to reach the quick ears of the gaoler, "I would once more entreat you not to entail endless misery upon yourself by marrying one whose crimes have rendered him unfit for the society to which he belongs Retract your promise, Sybilla, and I can meet death with fortitude and resignation."

"You have heard my fixed resolutions, Gilbert," she replied, "and therefore, it is useless to urge me any further upon that subject. I, however, half fear the promises that have been given by Martin Fetterlock, and, therefore, would I willingly take the task out of his hand by myself appealing to those who may have the power of saving your life from the rancour of your enemies."

"By heavens 'tis well thought of," whispered the squire, as a sudden thought seemed to inspire him. Seek out Lord Guildford Dudley, the husband of Queen Jane;—give him this ring, and say that Gilbert Hemmingsley is in danger of falling beneath the axe of the executioner."

"Your message shall be delivered," answered the trembling maiden,—"and now, dear Gilbert, what shall be the token that I am to receive from Martin Fetterlock assuring me of your safety."

Here the gaoler listened anxiously, in hopes of hearing this important part of the conversation, but the answer was given in so low a tone, that not a syllable of it reached his ear. Enraged at this, Fetterlock strode impatiently towards them, and seizing the maiden by the arm, he exclaimed savagely:—

"Come, come, this interview has lasted quite long enough, and it is now time that you depart. Leave the cell girl, and remember—to-morrow morning you become my bride."

"Aye, if you bring me the token agreed upon between me and Gilbert Hemmingsley," answered Sybilla;—"fail but in that, and from that time forward you never see me again. So now I am ready to follow you, Master Martin Fetterlock, and see that you fail not in your promise, as you would have me perform mine faithfully."

As she spoke she gave her hand to Gilbert, who, pressing her fondly to his heart, once more besought her not to sacrifice her own future happiness, merely for the purpose of prolonging an existence, which he declared would no longer be of value to him, when deprived of her society for ever. Here, however, they were interrupted by the gaoler, who, tearing her away from the squire's embrace, with the greatest violence forced her out of the cell, and then locking the door after them, he dragged her through the dark passage to the court-yard, from which they had entered the dreary abode of misery they had just quitted. The cool air of night somewhat revived Sybilla, and following her brutal conductor in silence, she brooded over the plans she was forming for the deliverance of her lover, without being compelled to bestow her hand upon one whom she could never regard with any other feeling save that of hatred and contempt.

CHAPTER XV.

DAME MARGARET DALSTON ATTENDED BY THE GIANTS AND THE DWARF GO FORTH IN SEARCH OF SYBILLA;—THE MEETING, AND HOW MARTIN FETTERLOCK PREVENTS THE MAIDEN HAVING AN INTERVIEW WITH LORD GUILDFORD DUDLEY;—CHRISTOPHER TAKES UPON HIMSELF THE OFFICE OF MESSENGER.

SYBILLA spoke not a word to her ruthless companion as they proceeded on their way towards the Stone Kitchen, though Martin Fetterlock took every opportunity he could to prevail upon her to enter into conversation with him. She however seemed to regard his presence with repugnance, and at last, when she perceived Dame Margaret Dalston, followed by the two giants and the dwarf crossing the Tower Green, she darted away from her companion like a frighted fawn, and flew to seek protection from those who she believed regarded the gaoler with very little better feeling than she did herself.

"Why Sybilla, girl, what ails thee?" exclaimed the dame, somewhat startled by this unexpected apparition, though she happened at the very time to be in search of her. "Where hast thou been wench, and what is it that has frightened thee out of thy wits in this fashion?"

"I have seen and heard enough this night to craze the brains of a bolder spirit than myself, good mother," replied Sybilla. "There is treachery going on that ye little think, and unless instant steps are taken to warn Lord Guildford Dudley, the blood of Gilbert Hemmingsley will—"

"Peace girl!" exclaimed the gaoler, who at that moment darted furiously towards her;—"speak not another word on that subject, unless you would draw down vengeance upon him you would save from death."

"I am not to be frightened by your threats," answered Sybilla; "I have sworn to convey a signal ring from Gilbert to the Queen's consort, and I will keep my word whatever may be the consequences to myself."

"'Tis well," exclaimed Martin Fetterlock, and then addressing himself to one of the giants, he continued:—"Hasten good Master Warder to Mark Hempreed, the executioner;—say that he is to make instant preparation for the beheading of a state prisoner, and bid him meet me an hour hence near the Bloody Tower, from whence I will convey him to the dungeon of the victim who is about to suffer."

"Great heaven support me!" cried Sybilla, terrified at these words;—"who,—who—Martin Fetterlock, is it for whom these dreadful preparations are to be made?"

"For Gilbert Hemmingsley—"

"Villain!" she cried in a tone of suppressed agony—"did you not promise scarce half an hour since, that his life should be spared, and that your own hands should restore him to liberty?"

"I did."

"And yet you have so soon forgotten your promise?"

"Abandon your design of seeking out the Lord Dudley, and you shall see that I can keep my word."

"I will—I will abandon it," cried Sybilla eagerly—"at least I will do so till I find that you are worse than your word."

"What is all this whispering about?" asked Dame Margaret Dalston, who had been watching them with a feeling of curiosity that she could not suppress.

"It is this, good dame," whispered the gaoler;—"Sybilla has fallen desperately in love with the young squire, Gilbert Hemmingsley, and I have been warning her against listening to the false vows of the court gad-flies. Thou must look sharply after her, Meg, or ere many hours have passed over thy head, she will have eloped with the gallant far beyond the reach of her protectors."

"Heaven protect us from such an evil!" exclaimed Dame Margaret;—"and yet Master Fetterlock, I cannot help thinking that thy fears have in this instance, outrun thy discretion."

"Trust me, I have told thee nothing but the truth," answered the gaoler who was resolved to involve Sybilla in a mesh from which she could not easily extricate herself. I have discovered the whole affair, I tell you dame,—the time for their elopement was settled, and unless I had penetrated the secret, they would have flown together ere thou risest from thy couch in the morning."

"But the youth you speak of is a prisoner."

"He is, yet there are ways to break from a prison, and I can tell you these young folks had hit upon a cunningly devised plan, that would have set all our bolts and bars at defiance if we had not thwarted them."

"Thanks,—a thousand thanks for your vigilance, Martin Fetterlock," exclaimed the female;—"you have done us a great service in thus thwarting these young folks in their mad enterprize, and never shalt thou visit the Stone Kitchen without meeting with a hearty welcome for thy pains. But I prithee how shall we next proceed, so as to prevent Sybilla and her lover from executing their foolish project?"

"The remedy is in thine own hands," answered the gaoler, "let the maiden be locked up in her own chamber till this youth be got rid of, which I hope will not be longer than to-morrow morning—and then the girl shall give her hand to me, and your troubles on that score will be at an end."

Dame Margaret Dalston promised to secure Sybilla, so as to prevent the expected elopement with the squire, and while she was settling a few other points with the gaoler, the maiden was addressing herself to little Christopher, whose gallantry and faithful services she had experienced on former occasions.

"Wilt thou serve me, good Christopher?" she said, standing so as to bring her mouth as near as possible to the ear of the dwarf; "I have a commission to execute, and, almost destitute of friends as I am, there is no one else to whom I care to apply, except yourself."

"Most excellent maiden," exclaimed the dwarf, flattered by her compliment, "thou could'st not have pleased me more than by making me thy messenger. Would'st thou have me traverse half the globe to do thine errand, or shall I——"

"Nay, I will not be more troublesome to thee than need requires," answered Sybilla. The truth is there is one in peril whom I would save from immediate death, and the means of doing so are in thy power."

"Ah, ha!" chuckled the dwarf—"a love affair, I see,—nay, never blush that I have discovered thy secret fair maiden, for though the honour of knighthood has not yet been conferred upon me, I am yet sworn to serve all damsels who need my assistance, and thou shalt find me faithful and true to thy cause whenever thou mayst be pleased to test my humble abilities."

"That which I need of thee will not call forth any very great exertion," replied Sybilla, who, in spite of her troubles could scarcely forbear a smile at the high flown compliments of her little champion; "thou hast, I believe, access to the Lord Guildford Dudley, and all I require of thee is that thou wilt convey to him this ring upon which depend the existence of a fellow creature."

"By St. George! but this is an important duty though," exclaimed Christopher. "It requires secrecy and dispatch both, which qualities thou wilt find I possess in an eminent degree."

"Doubtless I shall find it so,' answered the maiden, "but let me warn thee chiefly not to let Martin Fetterlock know the business thou hast undertaken. Seek an immediate interview with Lord Dudley and place this ring in his hand with an intimation that Gilbert Hemmingsley is now suffering imprisonment beneath one of the towers of this fortress. Tell him that he is threatened with immediate death through the treachery of a vindictive foe, and warn him that if he would save the life of a faithful follower he must not lose a single instant ere he seeks for the means to deliver him from his loathsome dungeon. Urge him as thou would'st for the life of a brother, and leave him not till you see preparations commenced for rescuing the prisoner."

"All shall be as you have said," exclaimed the dwarf,—"but I prithee, tell me maiden, if his highness should ask me how I became possessed of this jewel, shall I tell him it was given me by one who hopes soon to become the bride of the man he is to rescue."

"Thou art over bold, Sir Dwarf," replied Sybilla, "and yet perhaps after all thy suspicions are natural enough, seeing that my exceeding earnestness in this matter may well give room for such a suspicion. However, I pardon thee on condition that thou performest thine errand well, and if his highness should chance to enquire who gave thee the ring, thou mayst make the best excuse thou canst, omitting of course, to tell him that it was I who have been thus forward in this act of mercy."

The dwarf slipped away unperceived as she said this, and at the same moment Martin Fetterlock approached the spot where Sybilla was standing.

"Thou wilt see me with the token of Gilbert's safety ere long," he whispered;—"abide with patience and thou shalt find that I will not be worse than my word."

With that, Dame Margeret Dalston led Sybilla from the place, and at the same moment the gaoler and the two giants took their departure; the former to complete the acts of villany in which he was engaged, and the latter to partake of another hearty meal before they retired to rest.

CHAPTER XVI.

RICHARD CALCROFT BEGINS TO FIND IMPRISONMENT IRKSOME, AND THE MEASURES HE TAKES TO RELIEVE HIMSELF.—CONSTERNATION IN THE FORTRESS.—HOW MARTIN FETTERLOCK PROVES TO BE TOO MUCH FOR THE DWARF, AND HOW CHRISTOPHER DUMPS GETS LAUGHED AT FOR HIS PAINS.

When Richard Calcroft was left alone after the departure of the two giants from the chamber in which he was confined, he began to set himself in good earnest about the task for freeing himself from the captivity into which he had fallen. He tried the chimney, but that was secured with stout iron bars, placed across, a little way up, and finding himself defeated in that plan, he next examined the door, thinking it might not have been fastened by the last persons who left the place. This, however, defied all his efforts to open it, and then, as a last resource, he approached the window to see whether there was any possibility of effecting his escape that way. A momentary glance served to convince him that every precaution had been taken to render the place secure by means of stout perpendicular stauncheons, so closely placed together as to forbid all hopes of forcing his body between; and so convinced was he that his flight had been thus effectually prevented, that he was about to give np his project in despair, when he felt one of the bars shake beneath his grasp, as if time and long exposure to the air had loosened it in its socket. Somewhat re-assured by this, he applied himself vigorously to the task of removing this impediment, and at length, to his great joy, the stone-work broke away, and thus rendered easy the further labour of removing the bar from its place.

This done, Richard Calcroft looked through the opening he had thus made, and, by the light of the moon, he could see beneath him the ramparts which defended the fortress on the side facing Tower Hill. To reach this, he thought, would not be very difficult, for he remembered having seen a coil of rope lying in one corner of the room, and at all events the danger he might run of being discovered would be fully counterbalanced should he be fortunate enough to succeed in his endeavours.

Thus resolved, he groped his way to the corner, and having secured one end of the rope round his waist and the other to a bar of his window, he commenced his perilous descent towards the ramparts. But now a fresh danger threatened to destroy the hopes which had thus urged him on, for whilst he was hanging suspended mid-way, the measured footsteps of a sentinel were heard, and almost immediately afterwards one of the warders was seen turning the angle of the Tower, wending his solitary way towards the other end of the post which had been allotted to him. Fortunately, for the prisoner, he kept his gaze fixed upon the opposite side of the ditch, and passing onwards was soon lost in the obscurity of the night. Richard Calcroft had paused in his descent when the intruder first made his appearance, but no sooner had the warder left the place than he silently glided down to the rampart, where, having released himself from the rope that had thus far befriended him, he was about to leap over the wall into the ditch, when a party of soldiers approached the spot to relieve guard.

Thus situated, not a moment was to be lost, and springing upon the stock of a cannon he threw himself on the wall, and from thence, precipitated himself into the ditch, at the very moment when a volley of musketry announced that his flight had been discovered, and that an immediate persuit would be the consequence.

Alarmed by the loud report of fire arms, a number of other soldiers rushed towards the spot, who, hearing that a prisoner had just escaped across the moat, discharged their pieces towards the spot pointed out by those who had witnessed the flight of the devoted captive. But Richard Calcroft had foreseen that such would be the case, and resolving to defeat their sanguinary measures, he swam a hundred yards or so up the ditch, and then boldly striking forward, crossed the moat at a considerable distance from the spot where he had been expected to land by his enemies. Here, however, he was again in peril of falling into the hands of those who were thirsting for his blood, for just as he was setting foot upon dry land a party of soldiers rushed towards him with a loud cry of triumph. Still, however, he was favoured by the darkness of the night, for by this time the moon was completely obscured behind a dense mass of clouds, and rushing, he knew not whither, he managed once more to elude the grasp of those who would again have delivered him into the hands of his foes. Thus freed from a peril which but a moment before had appeared to be so iminent, he rushed madly on, scarce knowing or caring which way he went, until he reached a churchyard, which he entered at full speed, and where he hoped to find a temporary hiding-place among the tomb-stones, with which the place was thickly crouded. Nor were his expectations in vain, for presently afterwards he heard the rapid tread and the hoarse voices of his pursuers passing the place of his concealment, and in a few minutes more all was again as quiet as if nothing had occurred to disturb the serenity of the night. Taking this opportunity, therefore, he once again ventured to leave the churchyard, and then passing through the least frequented streets of London, he went to seek some hiding place where he might remain till it would be safe to join the rapidly increasing adherents of the Princess Mary.

Meanwhile, the utmost confusion reigned in the Tower, for the reported escape of a prisoner had soon spread throughout the fortress, and all anxiously pressed towards that part of the ramparts from which Richard Calcroft had so recklessly thrown himself in spite of the almost certain death that awaited him in the moat. Among the most active on this occasion was the lieutenant of the Tower, whose honour was somewhat implicated in the affair, and great was his indignation as he called the warders one after another before him to give an account of the transaction. But this trouble he might as well have spared himself, for none of them could throw any light on the subject, and he was, after all, obliged to content himself with ordering two or three of them into confinement, whilst he instituted the most rigid enquires into an affair that would be sure to call down the wrath of the fiery Duke of Northumberland, unless any means could be devised by which to re-capture the prisoner before his escape came to be known at head quarters. Having thus far satisfied himself by pouring out his wrath upon his understrappers, the lieutenant hastened away to execute some further projects for the fulfilment of his design, and thus, by an extraordinary exertion of diligence, make what amends he could for the accident that had occurred.

"Well," exclaimed Hugh the giant, as soon as the lieutenant was gone, "it seems to me that very little good is to be done here, so, as a reward is most likely to be earned by bringing back the runaway, I shall e'en make after him as fast as I can, and bring him back to his old quarters."

"First catch him, and then bring him back, Master Hugh," cried the dwarf, twitching his ponderous friend by the doublet. "It is easy for thee to give chace after a man that has just his liberty, but he will hardly be fool enough to wait for his pursuers, knowing as he does, that a rope will be his doom, if once he finds his way back to this place."

"Humph!" grunted the other, "so thou would'st have a rogue escape, merely because it is too much trouble to go in pursuit of him?"

"Nay, I said not that either, good Master Hugh; but the truth is, I have better work for thee to do,"

"Better work than to capture one of the queen's enemies!" cried the giant with surprise. "Can I employ myself in a more honourable way, than by giving up a traitor to the death he so justly merits?"

"Ah! it's all very well to talk of these things," answered Christopher Dumps, "but the truth is, he thou would'st go in search of is far enough from danger by this time, I'll answer for it;—besides, there is an act of gallantry for thee to perform;—a maiden has given me a commission to execute, and knowing thy love for the sex, I would transfer the honour to thyself."

Martin Fetterlock, who was close by, overheard these words, and ready for mischief, as he always was, he drew yet nearer, without being observed by either of the speakers, and listened anxiously to the conversation that followed.

"And pray," exclaimed Hugh, "what damsel hath been simple enough to trust thee with the execution of a service."

"One whom thou wilt presently acknowledge, is not so very simple as thou hast said," answered the dwarf. "The maiden is no other than the fair Sybilla, and the very fact of her having selected me to perform this errand, shows that she is not wanting in either wit or discretion."

"Tush! she is only amusing herself at thy expense," cried the giant. "This is some of her merry humours, and she thinks to get thee into some foolish scrape, in order that she may have a laugh at thee for ever afterwards."

"There again thou art wrong," answered Christopher, "for even if she was disposed for enjoying herself at my expense, she would hardly have thought of making a butt of my Lord Guildford Dudley, as well as myself."

"Hah!—this is some love affair, then," exclaimed Hugh;—"well, well, I know the sex to be fickle and inconstant, yet, never did I expect to see the fair and gentle Sybilla yield to the seductive arts of a pamper lord."

"Of a verity, friend Hugh, thou dost her a most scandalous wrong," exclaimed the dwarf. "Sybilla has never held converse with the nobleman we speak of; and so far from this being any thing like a love affair between them, she has strictly charged me, not on any account to tell him from whom I bear the message."

"By St. George of England! but all this appears to be very mysterious!" cried the giant. "Thou sayest thou hast a message to deliver from the girl to his lordship, and yet thou would'st fain make me believe that they are both innocent of any intrigue. But proceed, good Kit:—thou, it seems, art unable to perform the errand thou hast undertaken, and, therefore, I am to do the office for thee."

"Right! thou hast exactly hit it."

"And what, I prithee, am I to do?"

"Simply to deliver a ring into the hands of Lord Guildford Dudley, and to say that the owner of the bauble is now confined within one of the Tower dungeons, and that his life is placed in imminent peril through the treachery of a villain."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Martin Fetterlock, as he darted forward and snatched the ring from the dwarf at the very moment when he was handing it to Hugh; "this remains in my possession for the present, and, if needs be, I will myself convey it to the person for whom it was destined."

Hereupon the dwarf flew into a violent rage, and would have prevailed upon Hugh to rescue it from the hands into which it had fallen, but the giant was too much amused at the moment to take any heed of this request, and indulging in a tremendous roar of laughter, he soon brought around them a crowd of persons, to see what could be the cause of so much merriment. As for Christopher Dumps, he grew more and more enraged, in proportion as his unwieldy companion grew more obstreperous in his mirth, and, at last, plucking forth his rapier, he commenced an assault upon Martin Fetterlock, that threatened to turn the farce into a tragedy. As for the gaoler, he was too much irritated by the laughter of those about him to think of the disparity between him and his opponent, and drawing his weapon from his side, he began to use it so resolutely, that there is very little doubt but what Christopher would have paid dearly for his temerity, had not Hugh thrown himself between the combatants, and thus put an end to an affray, which, from its inequality, might have proved fatal to the dwarf.

"Come, come," cried Hugh, "fighting is all very well when two men of nearly the same size and weight chance to have a quarrel, but when it's an elephant to a cockroach, it's high time to put an end to it, lest the larger animal should chance to put his foot upon the smaller one, and crush him."

"Then he should not have provoked me to draw my sword," growled Fetterlock. "Thou hast rightly described him as a paltry insect, almost too contemptible to notice, and yet such reptiles sometimes carry stings that wound and smart too much for endurance."

"You hear how he speaks of me!" cried Christopher, preparing himself for another onslaught; "he calls me vile names, and yet you would prevent the chastisement he so richly deserves."

"Go to, thou art a silly fool for thy pains," exclaimed the gigantic warder. "Master Martin Fetterlock is no man for thee; he could slay thee with the least effort, and it is not for me, thy sworn friend and brother in arms, to see thee rush madly on certain death."

"Let me come at him, Hugh," cried the dwarf furiously; "let me come at him, I say, or, by heaven! I will turn my sword's point against thyself."

"Hear how the little animal talks," exclaimed Hugh, "gadzooks! he has courage enough for a man of larger growth, and to see him hector and bluster, one would half suspect he was really inclined to measure swords with me."

"And so I will, too, unless you make that scurvy knave either give me satisfaction, or the ring he so foully filched from me. Nay, I have sworn to perform mine errand for the fair Mistress Sybilla, and it shall be done, too, even though I chance to die for it."

"Bravely resolved, my little mannikin!" returned Hugh with a lear at the bystanders; "and yet methinks thou art foiled for once in thy life, for thou see'st Martin Fetterlock has stole away like an artful old fox as he is, and I dare say by this time he has delivered the signet into the hands of the Lord Guildford Dudley."

"And that is all thy fault," exclaimed Christopher reproachfully. "I have been made a fool of by that knave of a turnkey, and who have I to thank for it but the man who has sworn never to see me wronged."

"Why thou little fool, was it any fault of mine that the gaoler got from thee the ring thou wert entrusted with?" cried the merry warder. "Was it my fault that thou must go preaching of a secret, when other ears were open to hear it as well as mine?—Go to for a sorry varlet as thou art, and when next thou art trusted with a message keep thine eyes about thee and not let any know the business thou hast to execute."

"Hugh! hugh! thou art no friend of mine I see," shouted the little man in a rage. "The knaves here take advantage of me because my stature is less than their own, and thou, who art bigger than most men, can'st stand by and see me imposed upon. Faugh!—thy friendship is not worth so much as one of these pebbles at my feet, and from henceforth I utterly cast thee off as unworthy my esteem."

"Bravely said, my little cock sparrow!" exclaimed the giant who was highly amused at the vaunting of his diminutive opponent!—"by Jove thou hast a fair share of courage in that little carcase of thine, though, to speak truth, thou sadly lackest discretion or thou would'st not challenge an opponent who is big enough to put a dozen such as thyself into his pocket."

"Out with thy sword then and prove that thou art no braggart slave," vociferated the dwarf with ludicrous pomposity. "Measure weapons with me, Sir Giant, and if thou art the better man of the two, why my life will be at thy disposal and I shall at least die without dishonour."

With these words Christopher Dumps threw himself into a fencing posture and commenced an attack upon the giant's legs that might have proved annoying enough had not his antagonist stooped and lifted him off the ground with about as much ease as men of ordinary size would pick up a puppy dog. Upon this a tremendous shout of laughter was raised by the surrounding spectators, and in spite of the kickings, writhings, and struggles of the little man, his opponent succeeded in placing him upon the sill of a window about eight feet from the ground. Christopher now became exceedingly enraged; he swore, bullied, and blustered by turns with equal effect, for Hugh had immediately retired some distance from him and there he was left to get down from his elevated position as well as he could.

"Will no one assist me?" he cried reproachfully;—"or are ye all poltroons alike, that would stand by and see one man ill used by another without making an effort to rescue him?—Assist me to get down, I say, that I may teach yonder grinning saf, that he has one to deal with who will make him repent this act before he is many minutes older."

"Peace, thou silly varlet," exclaimed the giant, "and for once in thy life take discretion to thy council. Thou knowest I am thy friend, Kit, and if I have exalted thee a little in the world, it has been to place thee beyond the reach of danger. Say then, will you promise to conduct yourself with propriety, or must I leave that little carcase of thine where it is till thou hast come to thy senses?"

"I have been treated most scurvily."

"Psha! we want none of thy complaints now man;—say briefly—wilt thou be more orderly in thy conduct?"

"Wilt thou assist me if I say aye?"

"Upon the word of an honest man I will."

"Then I capitulate, most unworthy giant," exclaimed the other;—"release me from this disgraceful situation, and I promise to say no more upon the subject."

"That is well said," cried Hugh, lifting the little man from his exalted seat;—"thou hast chosen wisely, and in return, I will promise to do my best towards obtaining from Master Martin Fetterlock the restoration of that ring he so unjustly possessed himself of."

With this promise Christopher Dumps affected to be perfectly well satisfied, and following closely at the heels of the giant, he soon found himself released from the crowd of persons who had assembled to witness the extravagant folly he had been guilty of towards his *greatest* friend.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW MARTIN FETTERLOCK PROCEEDS IN HIS LOVE AFFAIR, AND HOW DAME MARGARET DALSTON ENCOURAGED HIM.—INTERVIEW BETWEEN THE GAOLER AND SYBILLA, AND HOW FETTERLOCK EXULTS IN THE SUCCESS OF HIS OWN BASE DESIGNS.

When Martin Fetterlock sneaked from the scene of confusion he had himself given rise to, he hurried off to the Stone Kitchen, where the first person he met was Dame Margaret Dalston, who was just then busying herself in sundry little household affairs, an occupation that called forth a good deal of grumbling, at what she pleased to term the laziness of those who ought to have performed the greater portion of these domestic affairs. Of course, Sybilla was the person alluded to in these outpourings of ill-humour, but as the party thus abused happened to be just then locked up in her own room, she was perfectly unconscious of the wrath directed against her, and in fact, so far was she from thinking of any thing of the kind, that her thoughts were at the time exclusively occupied in imagining the danger that still threatened Gilbert Hemmingsley, and the hardship of her own case in being prevented the consolation of making one more attempt for his rescue.

When the gaoler saw the ill-humour of the old woman, he wisely enough resolved to seat himself quietly in a corner, and there wait till an opportunity presented itself to declare the motive of his visit. But the keen eyes of Margaret Dalston soon detected him in his retreat, and suddenly casting aside her anger, she welcomed his return to the Stone Kitchen, and having unbidden, placed a jug of foaming ale before him, desired to know what business it was that brought him there after she supposed he had retired for the night.

"My business, good Dame," answered the gaoler, "requires despatch as well as secrecy. I must see this girl,—this Sybilla,—on an affair that may involve her own happiness as well as mine."

"Marry, thou shalt see her if thou wilt, Martin Fetterlock," returned the Dame. "I have locked her up in the next room, to prevent any further attempt being made to get an interview with that upstart squire;—but thou, as her future husband, shall of course see the wilful jade whenever thou pleasest."

"Say'st thou she is locked up?"

"Aye, as fast as lock and key can hold her," answered the Dame. "I have been young once myself, and know the mad pranks girls will play when they have a mind to do so, and therefore have I resolved to be on the right side, and she is now where thou may'st see her whenever thou hast a mind to do so."

"Thou hast done well dame," exclaimed Fetterlock; "caution is a goodly virtue in these cases, and depend on it, I will reward thee for thy pains one of these days. But come, let me see the wench, for time presses and I have some professional duties to perform before I make acquaintance with my pillow!"

"Mercy on us! why, surely, there is not an execution to take place here to night?"

"Aye, but there is though," answered the gaoler, "and to-morrow morning will see me with one prisoner the less to take care of."

"And may I ask the name of the unfortunate creature who is thus to be hurried out of the world without preparation?" asked the dame shuddering at the thought of what was to take place.

"Thou may'st enquire whatever thou pleasest," said Martin Fetterlock, "but it will be for a cautious man, like myself, to decide whether I shall answer your questions. In the present instance, my good dame, I must refuse, for the matter is to be kept strictly secret, and, perhaps, my own life might depend on the prudence with which I conduct myself in this affair."

"This is a strangely sudden affair," cried the dame, sorely puzzled, and not a little vexed with Fetterlock, for being so mighty particular with an old friend; "a very strange affair, indeed, and by the hurry there seems to get the matter concluded, I should be almost afraid that every thing is not exactly as it ought to be. And now, Martin Fetterlock, if that also is not to be kept a profound secret, I would know who it is that hath given the order for this cruel execution?"

"That, Dame Dalston, is an affair that can little concern you to know. Suffice it to say, the warrant has been signed by one whose commands are not to be slighted or neglected. I have my orders, good dame, from those who have a right to issue them, and if I hesitated to perform my duty, the chances are, that I should soon afterwards become myself a victim to the tender mercies of the executioner."

"Which heaven, in its mercy forbid!" cried Dame Dalston.

"Amen to that with all my heart!" exclaimed the gaoler, not at all relishing the idea of meeting such a fate as he had alluded to. "But come, dame, thou art forgetting that I must see this girl of thine, and the sooner I have my interview with her, the sooner I shall be able to get away on mine errand."

"I have already said she is in the next chamber," returned the old woman. "Perhaps she sulks at being locked up by herself, but be that as it may, you can speak to her if you choose, only don't give her a notion about this execution you have been speaking about, or the little fool may take it into her head to object more strongly than ever to making you her husband."

"Bah!" ejaculated Fetterlock; "I care not for the frowns with which she regards me. True, I shall insist upon her uniting herself with me, but I care not for her love, Dame Dalston, and when once the marriage ceremony has been performed she will be at liberty to go withersoever she pleases."

"Then you love her not."

"How can I," demanded Martin Fetterlock, "when she always treats me in a way that proves how much she detests me? Has she not shown a preference for this young courtly squire, and now that her head is filled with that romantic nonsense, there is little chance of her ever caring about me."

"And yet," said Dame Dalston, in a tone of surprise; "it seems that you would marry the girl, even though by doing so you render the remainder of her days miserable?"

"And good policy there is in the design too," answered the gaoler, unmoved by the reproach; "the wench belongs to a noble family, though at present she has no clue to discover the illustrious branch from which she has sprung. Once mine, I can afford the ready means to trace all matters to their source; the wealth she inherits will be mine, and then, if she chooses to leave my society, it will be as a beggar and a houseless wanderer."

"Upon my word you have the coolest way of talking over these matters that ever I heard," cried the dame, whose good opinion of Master Martin Fetterlock, was not by any means increased by this worse explanation of his views. "You talk of marrying Sybilla as a most excellent bargain for yourself, but as for the girl, her happiness is of no consideration at all, unless she can content herself with the husband she has never professed to love."

"And what is it to thee, old woman?" demanded the gaoler in a tone that betokened no very good humour. "Thou wilt get a good round sum for helping me to obtain this wife, and, if conscience is not suffered to come in thy way, thou may'st pass the remainder of thy days in ease and comfort."

"Well, well," exclaimed Dame Dalston, "thou knowest I have ever favoured thy cause with the girl, and I am not now going to throw obstacles in the way of thy marriage. I will still continue to give thee my aid, Martin Fetterlock, and it shall be no fault of mine if the wench does not think better of thee than she has been used to do."

"It is satisfactory to know that she cannot think worse of me," answered the gaoler, with a grim smile; "she seems to have picked up a notion that I am all that is base in human nature, and the consequence is, that she regards a marriage with me as one of the things in

life, most to be dreaded and avoided. I have marked the haughty scowl with which she always greets my approach, and my only consolation is, that I can afterwards make her repent this sort of conduct."

"And yet," cried the old woman, "I should be sorry to see her life rendered miserable, too; she is almost like a daughter to me. Martin, and if you knew how affectionate and kind she is, you would think twice ere you wilfully gave her a moment's sorrow."

"Tush!—I would see the girl instantly," exclaimed the other impatiently; "lead me to her, dame, or I shall break in upon and alarm the wench with the suddenness of my visit."

Dame Dalston knocked at the door, which being instantly opened by Sybilla, Martin Fetterlock hastened to introduce himself into her chamber, where—the elder female having retired—he stood gazing upon his helpless victim with fiendish hate.

"Sybilla, girl, what ails thee?" he exclaimed while a triumphant smile lighted up his countenance;—"why dost thou look upon me thus;—am I grown so hateful to thee that thou hast not a word of welcome to greet me with?"

"I would that thou wert gone," she replied with suppressed emotion; "leave me, Martin Fetterlock, for thou knowest not the dread with which thy presence ever fills my soul."

"And thinkest thou I shall give up my pursuit of thee, because thy own heart is cold towards one whom it would be thy best interest to love?" demanded the gaoler. "Am I not permitted to pay my addresses to thee by those who have brought thee up from infancy, and shall I now yield up the fixed purpose of my soul because this young stranger,—this squire, without name or renown, chooses to thrust himself forward to displace me from thy heart."

"Thou knowest I never loved thee," answered Sybilla;—"I have not sought to deceive thee, and even from the first I have told thee that my heart never could be thine."

"Aye, thou hast told me so," replied Fetterlock, "but I know that I had Dame Dalstone's interest to back me, and what care I for thy frowns so that I am certain of obtaining my fair prize by her means? Thou art the adopted child of these people, and they will exercise their right of bestowing thee upon whoever shall appear to be the best husband."

"I warn them to beware how they rouse me to resistance," answered Sybilla firmly;—"hitherto I have been obedient to every command of those who took charge of me during my infancy, but the time is now come when it is necessary to assert my own right to be heard, and my oppressors will find that I have both the power and inclination to foil them in any plans where my own happiness is at stake."

"Nay, you dare not," exclaimed Martin Fetterlock.

"That at least remains to be proved," answered the maiden with an air of greater resolution than she had ever before assumed. "I have thus far been submissive to those who have tyrannized over me, but the time has now arrived when I must cast off the shackles they have thrown around me, and declare my own right to decide in a case where my own happiness is so greatly at stake."

"You will repent this," cried the gaoler fiercely; "these words have been prompted by the insolence of the squire, but he, as well yourself will yet learn how dangerous it is to rouse the anger of those who have both the will and the power to punish you for it."

"Leave me," exclaimed Sybilla indignantly;—"leave me, sir, I command, or at least learn to curb your insolence before one who neither owns nor will submit to your unjust domination."

"And how canst thou help thyself, poor wretch?" demanded Martin Fetterlock with feigned commisseration. "True, thou art completely in my power, and the only one to whom thou canst look for succour in this straight, is even now a prisoner at the mercy of his gaoler."

"And thou would'st murder him!" cried Sybilla in despair.

"Why, that depends upon circumstances," answered the other doggedly; "I want not that his blood should stain my hands, but his life depends upon whether thou wilt become mine."

"Thou durst not slay him, even though he be thine enemy," cried the maiden.

"And wherefore should I fear to rid myself of one whose very existence embitters my own?" demanded Fetterlock.

"Because thy life would be endangered were Gilbert Hemmingsley injured by thy means," answered the maiden. "I should know that thou wert his assassin, and never would I relax my endeavours until thou hadst paid the forfeit of thy crime on the scaffold."

"Thy language is bold, girl."

"Perhaps so, but not bolder than my actions will be, should there be any necessity for arraying myself against thee as thine enemy."

"And why, I prithee, should one so fair and beauteous be mine enemy?" demanded the gaoler.

"Because thou hast ever proved thyself the hateful foe of my happiness," answered Sybilla. "Had it not been for thee I might have been in the enjoyment of comparative peace, and he whom my heart loves,—the rival thou hast thus oppressed,—would have escaped the imprisonment to which he has been subjected through thy barbarity."

"Girl!" exclaimed Fetterlock angrily, "thy words are like daggers to my heart, and each moment makes me feel more keenly the injuries that have been inflicted on me by this hateful rival. He has robbed me of thy love, Sybilla, but it is now my turn to triumph, and it only remains for yourself to pronounce the words that shall either give him to liberty or an instant death."

"Hah?" shrieked the terrified girl, "thou wilt slay him then?"

"Aye, so surely as I live to tell thee so," answered the gaoler.

"And will no sacrifice preserve him from thy hate?"

"Thyself can do it," replied Fetterlock;—"resign thy love for my prisoner and he shall be free."

"Never!"

"Then ere the rising of to-morrow's sun he dies!"

"Oh, in mercy spare him!" cried Sybilla;—"oh! where is the token thou wert to bring from him?—the blessed sign that was to assure me his life was safe."

"Ere I answer that question," returned the gaoler, "tell me why thou didst attempt to deceive me?—I trusted thee, and yet didst thou try to send the youth's signet ring by a messenger to the Lord Guildford Dudley."

"Betrayed!—lost—lost for ever!" cried Sybilla grief-stricken at the miscarriage of her only hope.

"Aye, thou may'st well yield thyself to despair," exclaimed the other in a tone of exultation;—"every chance of releasing my rival has disappeared, and thou may'st now behold the jewel in my possession which was sent to Lord Dudley in the hope of obtaining his immediate assistance. Look upon it, Sybilla—gaze upon the evidence of thy broken hopes, and learn from this time forward to forget one who is dead to thee."

Overwhelmed with grief Sybilla buried her face in her hands, and sobbing heavily she fell insensible to the floor, in which situation she was left by Martin Fetterlock, whose heart exulted in the misery and despair he had occasioned.

"Hasten to the room and see to the girl," he exclaimed on passing Dame Margaret Dalston;—"she is ill, old woman, and requires thine art to restore her."

Alarmed at these words the dame hurried to the chamber, where she found Sybilla in the situation we have described.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RICHARD CALCROFT MEETS AN ADVENTURE AFTER HIS ESCAPE FROM THE TOWER.—TREACHERY AT WORK, AND THE OBJECT AGAINST WHOM IT IS DIRECTED.—AN APPOINTMENT FOR ANOTHER MEETING.

It was not till Richard Calcroft had got some distance from the Tower, after his escape, as mentioned in a former chapter, that he ventured to relax his speed, lest some of his enemies should still be continuing their pursuit, in hopes of once more placing him in his former place of confinement. As he passed St. Paul's Church, the clock was just tolling forth the hour of four, and then glancing at the windows, through which the moonbeams were shining with a light almost as bright as day, he said aloud:—

"May the curses of heaven fall upon those who have perverted our holy religion. under the pretence of rendering it more pure! Yon sacred pile was raised by the piety of our forefathers for the celebration of the church's rites, in all their ancient excellence, and yet, now men's hearts have changed, religion totters to her ruin, and when, at last, a brighter gleam began to dawn, bad men were to be found with hearts base enough to raise Lady Jane Grey to the throne of England for no other purpose than to ——"

"Utterly overthrow the Roman Catholic Church," interrupted a voice close by, and looking round, Richard Calcroft beheld near him a stranger, whose attire announced that he belonged to a higher class in society, and who was gazing upon him with an anxiety of countenance, that betrayed a desire to become more intimate with the object who had thus engaged his scrutiny. Richard began to fear lest this might be some one who had followed him from the Tower, and feeling no inclination to be re-conveyed to his old quarters, he was about to move onwards with increased speed, when the stranger laying his hand upon his shoulder, prevented his meditated design.

"Stay, I would speak to thee," exclaimed he in a voice of command; "thou belongest to the ancient religion of this country or my ears have greatly deceived me.

"I do," answered Richard Calcroft; "but what is that to thee, or why should thou ask a question that it may be dangerous to reply to?"

"My reasons thou shalt know another time," replied the stranger "at present, let it suffice thee to know that I am a friend from whom thou hast nothing to fear; nay, here is a purse of gold—take it,—and, remember, I may need thy services ere many hours shall have passed away."

"And how are we to meet?" asked Richard with surprise.

"That can be easily arranged afterwards," replied the other; "meet me to-morrow night at eleven on the same spot where we now stand, and I will tell thee more."

"This is marvellously strange," exclaimed Richard Calcroft, sorely puzzled to make out what it all meant; "I am accosted by a perfect stranger in the streets—a purse of money is forced into my hands, and an appointment is made for another evening, when some important business is to be divulged which at present I know nothing of. Nay, sir, upon second thoughts I like not the business, so take back thy purse and let me go on my way without further interruption."

"Stay!" cried the other impatiently, "thou art lately from the Tower of London, if I mistake not, escaped by swimming across the moat, if I may judge from thy wet clothes, and if so, thou may'st be in great danger through not heeding my words than thou canst possibly run the risk of by accepting the easy terms I would impose on thee."

"I see," exclaimed Richard Calcroft with evident vexation, "thou hast discovered my secret, and I may as well confess all, as seek for further security in a lie. I have just escaped from the place you have named, and if it is your wish to carry me back to my former prison, why here do I at once yield myself up, and then welcome death, for I dare say my enemies will not wish to keep me much longer in suspense."

"Tush!—do you take me for so arrant a knave?" cried the stranger indignantly. "Have I not said I would meet you here to-morrow night;—that I have something of importance to confer with thee upon, and that secrecy must be observed, as we are each of us in the power of the other."

"And how knowest thou I am to be trusted?" asked Richard.

"Because I have seen thee before, and remarked to myself at the time that thou wert the very youth to aid a man who might require the assistance of one possessed of prudence, vigour, and an undaunted spirit."

"And art thou sure I have all these qualities?" enquired Richard.

"I feel convinced that thou hast," replied the stranger. "I saw thee and the old dame, thy mother, on the morn when Queen Jane was about to embark on board her barge on her ill-advised visit to the Tower. Thy mother warned her of the peril that awaited her if once she assumed the royal title, and dearly would she have paid for her temerity, had not the haughty Duke of Northumberland been checked by the more gentle voice of the fair girl, who he is now making the mere instrument for raising himself to the throne."

"Is there no way to arrest his career of ambition?" demanded Richard Calcroft, looking cautiously round to see whether they were quite alone. "Is there, I say, no way to avert the evils that are about to fall upon this devoted country?"

"The death of Northumberland can alone save us," answered the stranger, after a pause, during which he seemed to be considering whether it would be safe to say too much;—"thou art almost unknown to me, yet have I, perhaps foolishly, intrusted thee with a secret that may end in my own destruction;—say, wilt thou swear to me to aid in the downfall of this proud noble, or, by thy refusal, shall I know thee for a foe, who will take the earliest opportunity to effect my ruin?"

"At present, I shall remain silent upon the subject," answered Richard Calcroft, "though, to tell thee the truth, I am no greater friend to the Duke of Northumberland than thou seemest thyself. However we are to meet on this spot to-morrow, and perhaps by that time we shall both of us be better prepared to declare what steps we are inclined to pursue."

"Be it so," returned the stranger;—"but what will thy mother say to our design? Thinkest thou she will make one to pull down this hated peer?"

"I know not," replied Richard, "but she is in the Tower, where thou may'st see her, and learn how far she is willing to go in an affair, that I know she cherishes as one that involves the security of the religion she most loves."

"Is she imprisoned there?" enquired the stranger anxiously.

"At present she is not," replied Richard Calcroft, "though how long she will be suffered to have her liberty I know not. The Duke of Northumberland does not at present know of her being so near him, or the chances are that he would take speedy measures for ridding himself of one who he knows regards him with an eye of hatred."

"I will make the attempt at any rate," exclaimed the stranger after a moment's pause. "I will immediately take my way to the Tower, where I have friends who will give me admittance at one of the smaller posterns. Once there, I will soon find out Mable Calcroft, and between us we may perhaps prepare a plot that will make Northumberland and his friends tremble at the coming storm. It is a fearful alternative that we have to adopt, but such as it is, let those who have given occasion for it, beware!"

"And what part am I play in this drama?" asked Richard Calcroft, as the other was about to take his departure.

"That thou shalt know to-morrow night when we meet," replied the stranger. "That thou art loyal to our true queen, I have every reason to believe, but till the time arrives it would be unsafe were too many made acquainted with my secret."

"Marry, sir stranger," exclaimed Richard Calcroft, "thou little knowest how severely I have suffered within this few hours for having taken part with the Princess Mary, whom heaven, I trust, will yet restore to her throne. Even now I bear about me the marks of the blows I have received in her behalf, and still am I willing to endure the scourge for her who can alone save the kingdom from utter ruin."

"Be bold and resolute, and every thing will fall out as we would desire," returned the stranger. "The rightful sovereign has many friends who are secretly working for her good, and the moment is not far off when we shall behold her on that eminence from which she has been unjustly driven, by those who have adopted the cause of her rival, the usurper, Lady Jane Grey. Hearts are anxiously beating for the much desired period that shall see England rescued from the power of Northumberland and his faction, and unless some direful mishap occurs, thou, as a reward for thy zeal, shalt change thy course doublet for a more gaudy one ere any great time shall have passed away."

"Why, as for my zeal," replied Richard Calcroft, "I believe there are few in this nation who can boast more honesty of intention than myself. At the proclamation of the Lady Jane, my voice was almost the only one that was raised in behalf of the Princess Mary, and dearly was I made to pay for my temerity, for the scurvy knaves dragged me off to the Tower, where it's most likely I should have met with a dog's death had I not made short work of the matter, by swimming over the moat in spite of the shots that were sent after me by those who would have been glad to see me sink to the bottom."

"Well, never mind, my friend," cried the stranger, "for since thou hast so well escaped with a whole skin, thou canst well afford to laugh at them for the pains they have been at to spoil thy jerkin. So now be advised by me, return home with what speed thou canst; change thy wet clothing, and comfort thy inward man with a cup of warm sack. Do this, Master Richard Calcroft, and I'll answer for it thou wilt be well enough by the time we have appointed to meet to-morrow."

"Stay," exclaimed Richard, "it seems to me that thou knowest my name, which is an advantage I unfortunately possess not in my turn. Thou hast spoken to me of plots that are in progress, and deeds that are to be done, yet, between ourselves, I should feel much better satisfied with the affair if I knew who it was that takes so great an interest in my concerns."

"Be patient and thou shalt know all," exclaimed the stranger. "At present there are sufficient motives for keeping and maintaining my name a secret, though it is not unlikely but I may be induced to trust the matter to your mother's keeping. A few days, perhaps even a few hours, may render it safe to reveal myself to the world, and whenever the time comes for doing so, thou and others will acknowledge that no dishonourable motive induced me to conceal myself from those who would work my destruction. So farewell for the present, Richard Calcroft, and remember, to-morrow night, when the clock strikes eleven, I will be on this spot to meet thee; forget not your promise as you would meet your reward in this world and happiness in the next."

Striding away with these words, the stranger took his way towards the Tower of London, leaving Richard Calcroft to return home, pondering on the singular meeting, and wondering what would be the result.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW THE STRANGER RETURNS TO THE TOWER.—THE MANNER OF HIS ENTRANCE THERE.—WHAT PASSED BETWEEN HIM AND THE SENTINEL WHO GAVE HIM ADMITTANCE.—THE DWARF AND THE SOLDIER.—A SCENE BETWEEN THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER AND MABLE CALCROFT.

Having looked cautiously round him, and ascertained that no one was near him likely to dodge his steps, the stranger turned down some of the narrow and obscure streets that led towards the eastern part of London. Crossing Gracechurch street, he still continued to maintain the same caution, proceeding by the least frequented ways, and carefully avoiding the City watch which he occasionally met as they were wandering about on the usual nightly perambulations. At last he reached Tower Hill, where he again looked suspiciously around him, and being satisfied that no lurking danger was near, he crept stealthily towards one of the posterns, which was opened upon a given signal almost as soon as he had reached the place.

"Hist! not a word, Roderick, above your breath," exclaimed the stranger in a whisper, as the soldier who had given him admittance was about to speak. "We may be overheard, and my late absence from the fortress would give grounds for suspicions, that at present must be avoided as much as possible."

As he said this, he drew the man into a small building that stood near the postern, where it was less likely they would be observed, and when this precaution had been taken, he continued in the same subdued voice:—

"Has my absence been observed by any of those whose prying watchfullness I have reason to dread?"

"All has been quiet," returned the man, "for though some of the officers of Northumberland's party have been round to see that all is safe, I have heard nothing that might lead me to suppose the orders commanding that no one should be permitted to leave the Tower had been broken."

"Then all is safe," exclaimed the stranger, "for be assured if my absence had been noticed, the Duke or his minions would have commenced instant measures for discovering by what means I had escaped from the fortress, as well as to find out whether any body was concerned in assisting me."

"They must have had keen wits to have discovered that," answered the other. "If I have assisted you to leave this place it has been to serve a good cause, and even the rack should not force from me a confession that would endanger those I have sworn to die for rather than endanger. I am a humble but zealous friend of the persecuted Princess Mary,—who, alone, I will acknowledge as Queen, and let what may come of this, I am prepared to endure any thing rather than prove a traitor to the good cause."

"I would that all hearts were as faithful as thine is," cried the stranger with earnestness. "However," he continued, "there are enough Englishmen untainted with this heresy, that has urged the Lady Jane Grey to accept a throne to which she has no claim, and with a righteous claim to urge us on, there is little doubt but we shall succeed in restoring our country to peace and happiness."

"Does all go on well?"

"Even beyond my most sanguine expectations," answered the stranger, with a feeling of exultation that he could not suppress. "Numbers, aroused from their apathy by the overbearing conduct of Northumberland, are flocking to Mary's standard, and in a few days—nay, perhaps hours—she will march upon London to assert her own rights."

"Heaven speed her good cause, say I!" exclaimed Roderick with hearty fervour.

"Amen to that, with all my soul!" responded the other, and then, suddenly checking himself, he said:—"but I am wasting time, when there is yet much business to be done; hast thou seen aught of that old woman they call Mable Calcroft?"

"About an hour since, she was wandering about here," answered the soldier, and the poor half-crazy creature implored permission to pass out of the fortress in search of her son, who, they say, has contrived to escape by swimming across the moat."

"Fortunately, that is quite true," replied the stranger,—"Richard Calcroft is a strict adherent of our party, and scarcely half-an-hour since, I parted with him under a strict promise to meet again to-morrow night, when, perhaps, something may be arranged between us to bring this affair to a quick and certain conclusion."

"He is ardent in whatever he undertakes," answered the other, "and the chances are, that he will prove a useful friend whenever his services may be required. To be sure, he appears simple enough now, but something has always struck me that his sheepishness was only assumed, till a good opportunity should present itself to throw off the mask."

"Of that you may be assured, good Roderick," returned the stranger. "His present seeming innocence will serve to prevent any suspicion among his enemies, but, when requisite, he will prove himself a useful ally on our side."

"Know you aught of his history?" demanded Roderick.

"Nothing that may be divulged at present," answered the other; "this much, however, I will tell thee, the youth is not what he seems, and a very brief time may serve to place him in a situation which——"

"Hush!" interrupted the man; "I hear footsteps approaching from the draw-bridge. Away, away—lest, being seen together, suspicion should be aroused ere it is time."

"I go," whispered the other, "but first tell me, Roderick, where I am likely to meet with this Mable Calcroft?"

"I know not, unless it should chance to be in one of the chambers of the Byward Tower," answered the man; "yonder is your way to it: you will find the door open which leads to the stair-case, and by passing along close under the wall, you may escape the observation of those whose footsteps I hear approaching. Away, and above all things be careful not to be observed."

Without replying to this earnest adjuration of the soldier, the mysterious stranger glided away from the spot, and passing under the deep shadow of the wall he hurried away from the spot with an almost noiseless footstep. There was one, however, who had observed him as he effected his precipitate retreat, and that one was no other than Christopher Dumps the dwarf, who had a keen nose for hunting out mischief and who now advanced towards Roderick demanding in rather an authorative tone who it was that had just before stole away like a thief in the dark. But the soldier, who in reality hardly knew how to answer the question, affected not to hear the little man, and humming the burden of a popular ballad, he continued pacing up and down, followed

by Christopher, who never chose to be foiled whenever he had made up his mind to execute his project.

"Will you hear me or not, Roderick?" he at length exclaimed, bawling loud enough to be heard at the further extremity of the fortress; "will you hear me, I say, or must I make a complaint to those who will not be slow to extort the truth from thee, and at the same time punish thee for talking to people when thou should'st be attending to thy duties, which, let me tell you, at this moment happen to be none of the lightest."

"Upon my word, friend Christopher, I know not what you mean," answered Roderick at last. "I have been upon this weary duty for the last four hours, and yet have not seen or heard anything that you speak of."

"Dost thou think I am deaf or blind?"

"I should say thou wert both," answered the other; "or rather that thou art gone crazy, for none have been here save thyself, and that is not much, seeing that thou scarcely standeth two feet three without thy stockings!"

"Would'st thou insult me?"

"Shame on thee for a quarrelsome tyke that deserves a good ducking in the Tower ditch!" exclaimed Roderick. "For a silver groat I would roll thee in yonder pile of filth, only that I pity thee, seeing that thou hast been making too free in thy potations with those two roystering blades, the giants."

"And if I have, what business is that of thine?" demanded the dwarf fiercely. "Have I not a right to follow my own desires—to drink when I please, or to be sober, according to the humour in which I chance to find myself?"

"Certainly, most noble dwarf," answered the other; "and yet do I deny your right to question me upon a subject that lies between myself and my superior officer. Thou hast charged me with speaking to some one while on duty at my post, and strict as the orders are to-night, that charge might chance to cost me my life."

"The deuce it might!" exclaimed little Christopher; "then there ends the joke at once—for, between ourselves, my friend, I thought the petticoats were after thee—and, if the truth must be spoken, I even now feel convinced that a woman passed me just as I came up."

"And if such a thing had happened, could you have blamed a poor fellow for speaking when he had been addressed by a woman?" asked Roderick, by way of sounding how far he might rely upon the dwarf; "could'st thou, in fact, say I did wrong, if tempted by an angel in petticoats?"

"I should have said thou would'st have been undeserving the name of a man if thou had'st not spoken to her," replied the dwarf, drawing up his diminutive body to its full height. "Upon that point, good Roderick, all our sex are equally susceptible, and a man must speak if he be addressed by a woman, whether he happens to be in charge of an important post or——"

"Well, Christopher Dumps, such was my situation," interrupted the other. "I confess to having erred so far, and having thus thrown myself upon your mercy, of course you will not try to bring me into trouble through speaking of it."

"I certainly will not," replied the dwarf consequentially; "and yet it must be confessed you did wrong to deny just now that you had been speaking to ——"

"A man," interrupted Roderick; "I grant you I denied having been talking to a man since I have been on duty, but your uncommon sagacity has discovered that it was a female with whom I was engaged in conversation."

"Was she pretty?" asked the consequential Christopher.

"As an angel!"

"Why, then, you must have been worse than a heathen to have remained dumb in her presence!" exclaimed the dwarf; "beautiful as an angel, say you, good Roderick?—by St. George, of Cappadocia, perhaps thou can'st obtain an interview for me with the wench? Do that—and if she prove as fair as you have described, I will make a conquest, and thou shalt grow rich upon my good fortune."

"Go to—thou art a fool for thy pains!" exclaimed Roderick. "Suppose I love the wench—thinkest thou I would yield her up to thee, even to be made Lord General of the army?"

"That, I suppose," answered the dwarf pertly, "would depend upon whether the girl might happen to take a greater liking for me than for thyself."

"Coxcomb!" muttered the soldier contemptuously.

"Coxcomb in thy teeth, vile slave!" cried the little man in a towering passion. "Look to thine own follies, and when thou hast amended them it will be time to set about teaching me what I am not already proficient. "Coxcomb, forsooth—marry, thou hast better use fairer words, Master Roderick, or, losing my own *temper*, I may be inclined to try that of my sword on thy worthless hide!"

"What! quarrelling again!" exclaimed a voice from behind; "by all he saints in the calendar, but thou art a most daring swash-buckler, and hy life would not be worth half a minute's purchase if it were not that thy diminutive carcase is too contemptible to draw down upon thee the anger of any one who can write himself ' man.' "

" Leave me to settle my own disputes, will you, bully Hugh?" exclaimed the dwarf pettishly. " By'r lady! a man can never get himself into a bit of an affair of honour but thou must pop in thine ungainly carcase and mar whatever glory was to be achieved. Out upon thee, thou hideous lout!—leave us, and let those who are true men settle their grievances according to their own fancy."

" Then wait till thou hast the fair daylight to do it in," growled the giant, and at the same time pouncing his great leg-of-mutton fist upon the nape of Christopher's neck, he raised him somewhat in the fashion that a boy would lift up a puppy, and having dealt him a cuff on the ear, by way of keeping him quiet, he deposited him on his shoulder and thus bore him away to his own quarters. Christopher was in a desperate passion, it is true, but his huge friend took no notice of so unimportant a matter, and thus, in spite of all his threats and imprecations, the little man was at last safely deposited in a place of safety.

We must now return to the stranger, who, when he crept away on the approach of Christopher, directed his steps towards the Byward Tower, where he expected to meet with Mable Calcroft, to whom he had an important communication to make. As Roderick had told him he found the door of entrance open, and from thence winding up a narrow spiral staircase, he ascended to a spacious chamber, where the voice of the female he was in search of, was heard uttering imprecations upon her enemies, and pouring forth wild supplications to the saints to guard and protect her son in the desperate attempt he had made to escape. For a moment or two the stranger remained silent, and then having assured himself that he was right, he said in a low tone :—

" Mable Calcroft!—if it be indeed thou who art standing before me, confess thy name to one who comes hither as thy friend."

" And how know I that thou art a friend?" demanded the old woman bitterly; " Mable has few friends in the world, and none, I believe, would venture to come and see her in the Tower, where she is more likely to remain a prisoner than to regain her liberty on easy terms. How know I that thou art a friend of the wretched and the captive?"

" Because I am come hither purposely to see thee," answered the stranger. " There is business for thee to perform, and delay will perhaps ruin all that has been done."

" What business can'st thou have for me to perform?" asked Mable: " my days are nearly numbered, and I had hoped to have descended quietly to the grave without being called on again to interfere in the world's affairs. But say,—who is it that requires my presence?"

" You are desired to attend before the Privy Council."

" Hah!" she exclaimed; " perhaps they are going to pass a sentence of immediate death upon me!"

" Nay, they are friends who expect thee," answered the stranger. " Go with confidence among them, and thou wilt perhaps serve the state, and at the same time, earn a reward well worthy thine acceptance."

" And wherefore should I look for rewards on this earth?" asked Mable with bitter emphasis; " am I not near the end of my pilgrimage, and shall I now count upon my expected gains as if a long life of happiness were before me?"

" Art thou grown so selfish?" exclaimed the stranger, " or has age dulled thy memory, that thou rememberest not thy son, who but a few hours since escaped from this place, no less to the astonishment than the fierce rage of his persecutors. He is now at liberty, old woman, and is ready to engage in any enterprise, however hazardous it may be, that has for its object the raising of the Catholic Princess Mary to the throne which has been usurped."

"And will Richard Calcroft risk life and limb in the cause of oppressed royalty?" cried the dame anxiously.

"He is ready to exert himself in any way that may best serve the cause he has espoused."

"And how knowest thou that?"

"An hour since I met and conversed with him."

"Ah!" cried the old woman joyfully; "then he had escaped the hot pursuit of his enemies?"

"They had completely lost scent of their prey, and he was at perfect liberty to roam wherever he pleased," answered the stranger. "I knew him for the youth who had raised his voice in favour of her rival when the Lady Jane Grey was proclaimed, and having marked him as a bold and valuable ally in a desperate affair, such as we are engaged in, I at once broached the subject of a general rising in favour of Mary, by way of testing the feeling with which he would regard such a step. This I hinted darkly at, but he seemed to understand my meaning, and to-morrow night we meet again to enter further into the business."

"Aye, he is young, vigorous, and ardent, and may zealously serve thee," replied Mable Calcroft. "So far thou hast done well to choose so active an ally, but I cannot tell why thou should have thought of me as one who can in any way serve thy cause."

"That thou wilt hear from the Privy Council which is now assembled," answered the stranger.

"And what can those great folks want with one so humble and worthless as I am?"

"That I can tell thee if thou wishest it," returned the other. "Thou canst solve a question of vast importance. It is in thy power to reveal that which is at present hidden in mystery, and upon thy answer depends the course which the real friends of our country will adopt."

"Dost thou know what it is they would ask of me?" enquired the old woman anxiously. "Would they have me reveal that which would bring me to the scaffold as a traitress, or are the questions they would ask such as will not bring me to peril?"

"That will depend upon the degree of honesty with which thou answerest them," replied the stranger. "Nay, if thou art desirous of knowing what will be asked of thee, I can satisfy thee on that head at once."

"Is it concerning the late king, Edward the Sixth?"

"It is," answered the stranger, "and by thy blanched cheek I can see that thou already understandest my question. A report has gained ground that his majesty's death was hastened by poison, and some persons even go so far as to assert that the fatal potion was administered by your hands."

"Too true!—too true!" gasped Mable confounded by the unexpected manner in which this charge was mentioned. "The young king did perish by poison, but his death was only hastened by a few hours, tor even had no perfidy been then practised he must have died ere another night and day had passed away."

"I can believe thee," replied the stranger; "the sad event was only hastened by the Duke of Northumberland's contrivance, in order to secure the succession of his daughter-in-law, the Lady Jane Grey. So far we are well assured, but it yet remains to bring direct proofs to subıtiate that charge, and in less than a fortnight from this time his od shall have dyed the scaffold !"

'And what becomes of her who was the instrument of his guilt?" nanded the old woman.

'Her life," replied the stranger, "will be spared on condition that speaks the truth. Nay, more, I can promise that she shall be rerded to her hearts content."

'And must Northumberland die if I confess all this?"

'He must—the whole nation demands his blood!"

'Then I reject your offer, "replied the old woman after a moments' ıse; "you now behold me standing on the verge of the grave, and am I called upon to yield up another victim to the sanguinary laws my country."

"But the Duke of Northumberland merits no pity," replied the stranr; "he has ever spilt the blood of his enemies like water, and even great Duke of Somerset fell beneath the axe at this proud man's ldding."

"He did!—he did!" exclaimed Mable, with vengeful emphasis. Somerset was my best, my earliest friend, and yet, even he could not cape the wrath of this bad man. Aye, I have never forgotten the ur when the haughty Duke of Northumberland sent his rival to perish the axe; I saw the joy that lit up the face of the judge as he sent th the fiat of death, and from that moment I have hated the monr."

"And yet you afterwards aided him in administering the fatal aught to young King Edward!"

"I did,—but the tiger springs not upon its prey till he has made sure the victim. I knew that at that moment Northumberland was beyond y reach, and therefore, did I his bidding with seeming readiness. The ng fell at an early age, but he belonged to the heretic faction of these minions, and my heart was hardened against him. The cup was drained its poisonous contents, and I fondly believed a Catholic would succeed the throne, whose rules should restore our religion to its former ırity."

"It is still possible to save the nation," answered the stranger;—"we ve a charge to bring against Northumberland of having conspired with hers to procure the death of the king; you can prove his share in the ilt, and the moment that sees his head roll upon the scaffold proclaims ngland once more under the dominion of the Pope of Rome."

"And at the same time the Lady Jane Grey becomes a victim to those ho, like myself, detest her creed! She also must die ere the measure vengeance is filled!"

"True," answered the stranger after a brief pause:—"she must fall nid the general ruin of her party, or where will be the safety of those ho have laboured to such an end?"

"Then I, for one, withdraw myself from your party," exclaimed able firmly. "Let the guilty alone suffer in this affair, and I will do y best to bring upon them their just punishment; but if one innocent ctim is to be sacrificed, then will I shun ye as enemies, and the deed of rkness and of blood must be performed as ye best can without me."

"Nay, will you not hear reason?" demanded the stranger; "a great rong hath been done against our country,—an usurper has been set up ainst the right of the next heir to the throne, and yet you would spare r who has not hesitated to place herself on that dangerous eminence."

"The act was not her own, but that of her advisers," answered Mable alcroft. "In an evil hour she listened to the counsel of those who spoke but to betray, and shall we, therefore, punish an inexperienced girl who has unhappily fallen among those whose own ambitious purposes were to be served in spite of any risk that might involve her. No, no,—I would that all else meet their just deserts, but the Lady Jane must be suffered to escape harmless."

"You refuse then to assist us if the Lady Jane Grey is perilled by aught that you may say."

"I do," replied the old woman resolutely.

"But do you remember that the rack may force you to be more submissive to our will?"

"The rack shall never force me to be unjust towards one who merits not our cruelty," answered Mabel; "nor will your threats terrify me into joining with those secret conspirators, whose deeds bear not the light of day."

"You will think better of this," returned the stranger, who began to find that violence would avail him but little. "I will now leave you Mable for a brief space of time, and on my return you will be prepared to accompany me to the presence of the Privy Council, which is even now sitting in deliberation in the great hall."

Having spoken thus, the stranger suddenly took his departure, leaving Mable Calcroft to ponder over in silent solitude the events of the last half hour.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW QUEEN JANE NARROWLY ESCAPES ASSASSINATION.—HER CONFERENCE WITH SIR WILLIAM CECIL AND THE EARL OF PEMBROKE, AND THE ARTFUL MEANS THEY USE TO BRING ABOUT THEIR OWN ENDS.—SIMON RENARD EXPRESSES HIMSELF IN NO VERY VAGUE TERMS RELATIVE TO FUTURE EVENTS.

As soon as Queen Jane had ascertained that her husband, the Lord Guildford Dudley had left the Tower for his own private mansion, she became alarmed lest he also should rank himself among her enemies, and thus hasten that ruin which she but too surely saw was every instant threatening to crush her. She knew that if his protection was withdrawn she would be immediately thrown into the power of her unrelenting foes, and dreading a doom so full of terrors, she sent for Sir Wm. Cecil and the Earl of Pembroke to advise with her upon the step it would be most prudent to take.

Agitated with suspense, the bewildered Queen paced uneasily up and down the apartment; now bitterly reproaching herself for having accepted the regal dignity at the expense of her peace of mind, and now resolving to cast off the vain trappings of royalty, and to retire once more into that privacy in which alone she expected to find the happiness she had once enjoyed. In the midst of these reflections she was startled by a sound near her, and looking in the direction from whence it seemed to proceed, she was still further alarmed at perceiving that the heavy curtain which concealed one of the windows, was slightly agitated, as if some person or other had there concealed himself. Terrified at this apparent treachery, Jane screamed aloud for assistance, and as she did so, a man, whose form was nearly concealed in a large cloak, stole from the place and rushed through an open door which led towards a portion of the Tower that was but little used. So quick, however, was the man s retreat that her majesty was unable to obtain even a glimpse of eatures, but as he passed through the door the light fell upon a nard he held in his hand, and thus the traitorous designs that had ght him to her presence became manifest. Jane was now convinced she had by a miracle escaped the evil designs of an assassin, and ng into a chair, she gave way to those emotions which her perilous tion gave rise to.

this condition she was found by the Earl of Pembroke and Sir Wm. l, who, having been alarmed by her outcries, had hurried into the nber, where they found her sitting with her face buried in her hands, her whole manner betraying the most fearful state of agitation. In stant, however, their voices roused her from the painful reverie into h she had fallen, and then bidding them welcome to her presence, exclaimed with some appearance of agitation :—

If ye are friends of your queen your arrival is most timely. I have in danger of falling a sacrifice to the vengeance of an assassin, and it not been that your footsteps were heard approaching this apart- t, I should ere now have paid the dreadful penalty of that ambition has forced me to accept the unsought honour of a crown."

Ha !" cried Pembroke, startled by this intelligence; "who is it has dared to meditate so heinous an offence against the sacred on of my sovereign?"

Nay, that I know not, my lord," answered the queen, glancing sus- usly towards those whose loyalty she more than suspected. "The in escaped as I raised my voice for assistance, and hurrying through er door, has, no doubt, taken means ere this to prevent a discovery is guilty purpose. Of one thing, however, I am convinced—the , whoever he is, has been employed by my enemies, and, therefore, quite certain that it will not be long ere another, and perhaps a successful attempt is made to render vacant the throne to which my in Mary aspires."

Let us hope your majesty's suspicions in this respect are unfounded," rved the crafty Sir William Cecil. "Your rival it is true seeks to e herself on the throne which she considers herself on the throne h she considers her own just inheritance, yet pardon me if I doubt her malice would ever go so far as to seek the aid of treachery bloodshed."

Let us hope that I have judged my cousin somewhat too harshly is instance," answered Jane, with forced composure. "There is and more important business on which I would consult with you; tless, by this time, it is known that the Duke of Northumberland required—nay, insisted—that I should raise my husband, Lord dford Dudley, to the kingly dignity?"

We have heard such a report," replied Sir William Cecil, "but st doubted its truth since the wary Northumberland must well that such an act would be unsavourly to the people, and most y lead to the downfall of his own ambitious projects."

Say, rather, that it is only a part of his mad scheme for raising elf to the chief place in the government of this realm," cried the of Pembroke. "He aspires to power, and never will he give up fforts to attain it till the lords and commons of England have en out in a voice of thunder before which he must quail."

Nay, my good lord," interposed Queen Jane, "perhaps jealousy of ower may have instigated those words. I am aware that neither ou are friends to the aspiring duke, and I therefore warn you that attempt to injure him will be construed into an opinion that it is

I who am chiefly aimed at, and that your next effort will be to displa me in favour of my rival, Mary."

This was spoken with marked emphasis, and Pembroke, perceivi that artifice could alone rescue him from the dilemma in which he ha involved himself, suddenly changed his tactics, and assuming a mo humble deportment, said :—

"Your majesty has grievously misconceived my words—I would n seek to injure the duke, but, as a lover of my country, anxious to se cure its best interests, would gladly check the danger to which th ambition of one man might haply bring us."

"This is strange, my lord of Pembroke," exclaimed the queen, wi an expression of surprise. "Methought, from what Northumberla told me, you were one of those who were most anxious to see the elev tion of my husband to the throne."

"I certainly gave my assent to it," answered his lordship.

"And yet you now speak in condemnation of such a measure !"

"My reason for expressing an assent is easily given," returned th Earl of Pembroke ;—"the duke is my enemy—I ardently long to wi ness his overthrow, and nothing that I know of would so soon condu to such an end as the forcing his own son into the throne, for the bett securing his own unlimited power."

"But you must also be aware," answered the queen, "that the ru of your enemy would ensure my speedy destruction; when Northum berland falls, she who now holds the reins of government, will so become the victim of her foes. You start, my lord—but again I te you that when the Duke becomes the victim of his foes, the fatal blo and axe will speedily be prepared for my death !"

"Your majesty surely forgets," interposed Sir William Cecil, "th the hearts of your subjects are still loyal in your cause. My lord Pembroke has a character for bravery and honour scarcely to be equall throughout your dominions, and if ever the moment for proving h zeal in your cause should arrive, I will answer for it you will find hi the first in the ranks of his sovereign's friends."

"I pray heaven it may be so," sighed the queen ; "and now, my lor let me entreat of you to forget the enmity you have just expressed t wards the Duke. We have need of peace among our friends, for di union at such a moment as this, may plunge the nation into all t horrors of a civil war, and thus should I for ever curse the mome when I weakly yielded to the solicitations of those who elevated me the fearful eminence I have now assumed."

"May I ask," enquired Pembroke, "whether your majesty has y made up your mind with regard to Northumberland's demand; wheth in fact, it is your intention to yield up to your husband the throne y now possess ?"

"Your question cannot be answered so suddenly," replied Jane, aft a pause. "For myself the possession of power holds out no charm and yet I should, perhaps, hesitate ere I placed Lord Guildford Dudl in a situation that would increase the influence already possessed by l father. I know the jealousy with which he is watched, and will n willingly give cause for complaint to those who dread his power."

"But your husband, it is reported, has withdrawn himself from yo presence in anger," observed Pembroke. "He, it seems, at any ra has no distaste for the honours of royalty, and doubtless he thinks this means to force you into a compliance with the demands of l father."

"True, my lord, you have struck upon a chord that wakens all n

worst fears," answered Jane; "it is true, my husband has quitted me in anger, and yet perhaps the remonstrances of a friend may once more bring him back to reason. I would have you seek him out, say that his absence has given me great pain, and urge him to return ere it may, perhaps, be too late."

"I would cheerfully obey your majesty's commands," exclaimed the Earl of Pembroke, "only that I fear your anxiety for his return may afford him reason to suppose that his sudden flight has caused you to relent."

"In that case then," replied the queen, "I would have you say to him that my resolution is at present unchanged; tell him that I am unhappy at having incurred his anger, and bid him hasten to me here in the Tower, unless he would have me believe that his love for me has been destroyed because I have refused him a bauble that would have entailed upon him misery and perhaps an early death."

"Such a message," observed Sir William Cecil, "might be well from a wife to her erring husband, but surely the Queen of England should command that which she has the power to enforce."

"Nay," replied Jane, with a faint smile, "I am young at playing the part of a queen, and authority comes with an ill grace from a wife to her husband. Lord Dudley, I dare say, by this time, repents the step he has so hastily taken, and a kind message will bring the truant back to my feet. Say I am grieved at his absence, and earnestly, through you, entreat his return."

"And, like a wilful boy as he is, he will refuse," exclaimed Sir William Cecil.

"Alas! alas! that is a bitter suggestion to proceed from the lips of so grave a councillor as yourself," sighed the queen. "And yet," she continued, after a moment's reflection, "even if it should be so, I shall have performed my duty, however unsuccessful it may be in its results. Therefore, go forth with my message, and return to me with what speed you can, that I may know whether I am henceforth to reckon my husband as an enemy or a friend,"

"Your errand shall be faithfully performed," returned the Earl of Pembroke; "yet, ere we go, we must have your majesty's permission to leave the Tower, since the Duke of Northumberland has given strict orders that none shall pass the gates without leave first obtained."

"Take this ring, then," exclaimed the queen, presenting a valuable gem to the Earl,—"show it to the warder who guards the principle entrance, and it will secure your immediate departure on my entrance."

"That," observed Sir William Cecil, "is rather doubtful, seeing that the Duke of Northumberland has issued positive commands that none shall quit the fortress without his especial leave. In fact, we are captives, and must remain so until it pleases his grace to give us liberty."

"Ha!" cried Jane, starting at these words, "is my power thus to be set at nought, that the duke is thus to take upon himself the prerogatives of royalty?"

"Each day will serve to prove more and more that he arrogates to him the privileges of a king," observed the Earl of Pembroke, anxious to seize every opportunity by which he might bring odium upon his foe. "Even now he possesses more real power in the direction of affairs than your majesty; and when the time arrives, he will boldly cast aside the thin veil of hypocrisy that at present serves to conceal his ambitious designs, and when his purposes are fully ripe, he will leave his victim to the fate which his own base practices will have brought upon her."

"You wrong him there," cried Jane, anxious to shield the duke from the vindictive shafts of his enemies. "That he has been rash in urging my claims must be admitted, but still, he is not the black villain you would represent him."

"We will speak no farther upon the subject, then," said Pembroke, "but, since your majesty has honoured us with this message to your husband, we will at once depart upon our errand,—that is," he continued, "if they will allow us to depart without the express leave of the duke."

With these words the Earl and Sir William Cecil took their leave of the Queen, and slowly quitting the apartment they proceeded to execute the mission that had been entrusted to them. As for Jane, her thoughts were of too melancholy a turn to permit her to seek the society of her maids of honour, and having fastened the door by which the assassin had made his escape, she placed herself at the window from whence she could perceive the River Thames, and the gay barges of the nobility which were ever and anon passing up and down. At this moment her thoughts recurred to those happy days when, free from the cares of royalty, she could enjoy herself in the society of those she loved, and by whom she was beloved in return. She contrasted her present state with that which she had yielded up at the instigation of an ambitious man, and as her mind glanced once more upon the unalloyed happiness she had once possessed, tears of regret chased each other down her beauteous cheeks, and, with a sigh of regret for the present, she fervently prayed that circumstances might again restore her to peace and joy. In the midst of these meditations, however, she was aroused by the opening of the door, and on looking round to see who the intruder was, she perceived that the Earl of Pembroke, and Sir William Cecil had returned into her presence.

"How is this?" she exclaimed tremblingly and already half suspecting the truth;—"have my commands so soon been forgotten that you both present yourselves before me when I believed you were by this time on your way to perform the errand I entrusted you with?"

"Your majesty will presently perceive that it is no fault of mine," cried Pembroke throwing himself upon his knee before her. "Sir William and myself presented ourselves at the gate and showed the signet ring to the warder in the expectation of being allowed to pass through as messengers sent forth expressly by your majesty."

"And you were refused!" cried the queen flushed with anger.

"We were," answered the earl. "The warder, it is true, professed to know the ring, and declared his readiness to obey your majesty in all things where he was allowed to do so."

"Allowed to do so!" exclaimed Jane with surprise.

"Those were his very words," replied Pembroke;—"he would feel glad, he said to obey your majesty were he allowed to do so, and then he declared that the Duke of Northumberland had commanded all who kept the gates to obey no orders but those given by himself, and thus we were compelled to return and explain to your majesty the cause of our having failed in this mission."

"This is more than I expected," cried Jane, as soon as she could recover from the surprise into which this intelligence had thrown her;—"Northumberland is taking upon himself the power which should belong only to his sovereign, and the puppet he has exulted to an appearance of queenly dignity is now to be thrust aside as no longer useful to his aspiring ambition."

"It is even as I told your majesty," replied the Earl of Pembroke. "This proud noble is hourly strengthening himself for the coming struggle with those he has vaulted over, and when he finds himself, as he believes, sufficiently secure, he will seize upon the reins of government and become a ruler where he ought only to be a subject."

"And I," said Jane, unconsciously speaking aloud, "am to become the sacrifice."

"It is even so," answered the earl, glad to perceive that the queen was beginning to relax in the faith with which she had hitherto regarded the duke.

"Art thou sure of this?" demanded Jane.

"I feel but too well convinced of it," replied the nobleman. "Northumberland suffers nothing to stand in the way of his onward career; it is even reported that with a slow poison he hastened the death of the late King Edward, and were it considered necessary he would not hesitate to sacrifice your majesty by the same vile means."

"Nay," cried the queen shuddering, "this is spoken from the malevolence of thine own heart towards him; thou hatest the duke, and would bring odium upon him by the propagation of reports that have no further foundation than the exaggerations of those who would fain bring him to an ignominious death."

"You wrong me by believing that such a motive instigates me in this affair," answered the peer, earnestly. "What I have said is in all zeal for your majesty's safety, and in spite of the suspicions with which I am met, I again implore you to consider well ere you intrust yourself too much in the power of this base noble."

"I will observe him well," replied the queen, "though I cannot but confess that my own feelings are against harbouring any unjust suspicions against his motives. You will therefore leave me, and at the council which is to be holden, I will take such decisive measures as shall relieve me from any fears I may entertain of his motives, and at the same time remove him to a place where more active duties will engage his attention, and at the same time place him beyond the reach of his enemies. And now I pray both to depart, for my heart is already full of grief, and I would retire to the chapel of St. Peter's, where, by offering up my prayers to heaven, I may obtain that divine assistance which can alone strengthen and protect us."

Thus dismissed the Earl of Pembroke, followed by Sir William Cecil, left the royal presence and proceeded across the Tower green towards that part of the fortress in which their own lodgings were situated. As they passed onwards, however, they heard rapid footsteps following them, and turning to see by whom they were dogged, they perceived Simon Renard, the wily ambassador from Spain hurrying towards them.

"How went your business with the queen, gentleman?" he exclaimed, as soon as he had approached near enough to prevent the possibility of being overheard by any one; "is her majesty still so warmly attached to the duke that she will not see danger even when it threatens most nearly?"

"On the contrary," answered Sir William Cecil, "she seems to apprehend some hidden danger, and if she only continues of the same mind in which we left her, it will not be long ere the proud duke learns that the term of his much abused authority draws rapidly to a close. The affair, good Master Renard, is now growing ripe, and it will be our own fault if the harvest is not our own."

"But Jane must fall as well as the duke," muttered the Spaniard between his teeth; "queens have bowed their heads to the axe in this place ere now, and she who now sits upon the throne must, like them, be yielded up into the hands of the executioner."

"Alas!" cried Pembroke with feeling, "can one so young, so lovely as Jane be spared the horrible infliction of death?"

"Not if you would preserve our holy religion which has so long been trampled into the dust by these heretics," exclaimed Renard sullenly. "Are not the Catholics groaning under the persecution of the enemy, and shall we hesitate to act boldly when once we have it in our power to secure retribution? Are not two of our bishops suffering imprisonment in a loathsome dungeon within this very fortress? and shall we not, when we have it in our power, send all theirs to perish in the flame at Smithfield? I tell thee, my Lord of Pembroke, that we must govern them with a rod of iron; it is by terror only that we can restore the ancient religion, and the Lady Jane, in common with the rest, must fall a sacrifice to the zeal with which we shall execute our mission!"

"And cannot the mission be carried into effect by any other means than those of blood and cruelty?" asked Pembroke.

"When the limb is withered let it be cut off," exclaimed the Spaniard fiercely;—"too long already have these accursed heretics triumphed over our church, and when once we have succeeded in placing Mary upon the throne of England, the people shall see that a day of heavy reckoning has arrived, and that a punishment awaits all those who have dared to depart from our religion. But is is idle to speak of these things now;—my business is with the Lady Jane, and I would see her without delay."

"Then must you meet her in the Chapel of St. Peter yonder," answered Pembroke, "for when we left her she was about to proceed thither in order to appease her troubled spirits by prayer and humiliation. By this time she is prostrated before the altar, and soon you may have an opportunity of speaking to her on her return from the place of worship."

"Let us follow her thither," cried Renard;—"I will conceal myself somewhere until her religious duties are performed, and then perhaps I may have an opportunity of obtaining the interview I require."

So saying, the three entered the chapel together, when Simon Renard separating himself from the rest, stationed himself where he could observe without being seen, and as he fixed his gaze upon the lovely female before him he resolved never to relax in his endeavours until he had brought her to the scaffold!

CHAPTER XXI.

MONSIEUR SIMON RENARD'S INTERVIEW WITH QUEEN JANE IN THE CHAPEL OF ST. PETER.—A COMBAT BETWEEN NORTHUMBERLAND AND THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR PREVENTED THROUGH THE INTERFERENCE OF QUEEN JANE.—FURTHER PLOTS ARE IN PROGRESS.

When the queen rose from her knees before the altar, she advanced with a slow and solemn step towards the middle of the aisle where her female attendants were waiting to conduct her back to the apartments she had not long before left. She had been weeping, yet her tears softened not the stern heart of Simon Renard, who, stepping from his place of concealment, whispered in her ear—

"Your majesty will pardon the interruption, yet I have that to speak about that will admit of no delay."

"Proceed, Signor Renard," answered Jane, rather startled by the abruptness with which she had been addressed.

"There are too many ears on the listen around us," returned the Spaniard glancing his restless eye towards those by whom they were surrounded; "I would speak with you, but it is not fit that what I have to say should be overheard by those who would gladly communicate it to others. Let your attendants retire and then I will freely open my mind."

"That cannot be," replied the queen, fixing her gaze steadfastly upon him as if she would look into his very soul;—"I have enemies about, and it may be that this is merely an artfully contrived plan to destroy me."

"Your majesty is unjust in your suspicions,"cried Renard, evidently discomposed by her words;—"what enemies can you have, or why should any one seek to injure you since such an act would inevitably end in his destruction?"

"And yet," answered the queen, again regarding the Spaniard with a look of suspicion, "it is scarcely an hour since a stranger, wrapped in such a cloak as that you wear, was found secreted in my chamber. Fortunately his presence was detected ere he had an opportunity to carry his murderous design into execution, and the villain fled before any one could hasten to my assistance."

"Did you recognize his countenance?" asked Renard, anxiously.

"Unfortunately, I did not."

"Then, perhaps, after all, it might not have been an enemy."

"Nay," answered Jane, "I would gladly believe he was not; but the light happened to gleam upon a poignard he carried in his hand, and thus his treacherous errand was explained beyond all doubt."

"This is strange!" exclaimed the ambassador thoughtfully, "and had any other than your majesty told me, I should have been inclined to think there must be some mistake in it. However, be that as it may, you are safe in my presence, and therefore, I request that your attendants may be ordered to withdraw, so as to leave us together for a short time."

"I can only promise that they shall be placed at such a distance as to prevent the possibility of their overhearing us," answered the queen. "If that will do they shall have my orders to retire as far as the church door, if not, the interview you require must be postponed till some other, and perhaps, more fitting opportunity."

"I am content that it should be as your majesty has proposed," answered Simon Renard, after some deliberation; "with your permission I will order them to retire to the limits you have proposed, and——"

"Nay, sir," interrupted the queen, "I will myself give my attendants the necessary instructions. They are faithful friends of their unhappy mistress, and were my commands given through you they might suspect that some mischief was on foot against me."

A dark frown overspread the swarthy countenance of the Spaniard as Jane said this, but he was far too cunning to express any anger at it, and folding his arms across his breast he remained in statue-like repose until she had communicated to her favourite attendant, the Lady Catherine May, her commands that she and the rest of the royal suite should retire to the further end of the chapel until her interview with the ambassador was concluded. This done, she returned, and addressing herself to the ambassador, desired him to proceed with his mysterious business.

"I am here," began the Spaniard, "as a mediator between yourself and your people; as one who is most anxious for your own welfare and the peace of those you at present govern. Have I your majesty's permission to reveal my own thoughts upon the subject, and thus, perhaps, prevent the effusion of that blood which, unhappily, must flow unless an instant remedy is found to prevent it?"

"Your zeal in my behalf, Signor, deserves my best thanks," answered the queen with sarcasm. "Believe me, I know your motives, and fully appreciate them, but my destinies are in the hands of heaven, and I am prepared to abide by whatever may be the issue of that weakness which tempted me to grasp the sceptre of these dominions."

"Say, rather, that your destines are in the hands of Northumberland," exclaimed Simon Renard. "His ambition has placed you upon a fearful eminence from which you must ere long fall. Nay, look not thus reproachfully on one who would be your friend. The hour, I say, draws nigh when the nation will rise as one man against what they consider your usurpation; and I dread to think of the fate which must then be yours."

"My own fate, whatever it may be, alarms me not," replied the queen firmly, "but I will never consent to sacrifice my friends in the mere hope of saving myself from the consequences of my own weakness. Circumstances, Signor Renard, have exalted me to this giddy height; some of the best English blood is involved in my success or downfall, and let my own doom be what it may, I will remain steadfast to my friends."

"And thus perish with them!" muttered the ambassador.

"Would that I could fall alone, and that my own blood would be sufficient to appease the rage of our foes!" sighed the queen. "Death has no terrors for me, but my soul shrinks back aghast when I reflect upon the fate of those who have risked so much in my cause!"

"Then, why persist in maintaining your present dangerous position?" demanded the other.

"Because the religion I love and profess depends upon it," answered the queen. "In support of that I am ready to sacrifice all selfish considerations; and heaven knows how willing I would be to lay down my life rather than live to witness the restoration of those idolatrous rites which our ancestors have so recently abolished."

"And yet the current sets so strongly that it is now far beyond your power to stem it," exclaimed the Spaniard. "Each hour increases the number of your foes, and a very few days will serve to raise your cousin, Mary, to that throne which you at present occupy. Then will the enemies of our religion be made to feel the wrath they have drawn down upon themselves, and the blood of thousands will be poured out in vengeance for the foolish obstinacy of one weak woman."

"How!" exclaimed the queen reddening!—"am I to be insulted, Signor Renard.

"Pardon my warmth," answered the Spaniard, in a milder tone. "In my zeal I forget myself for a moment; you, however, will forgive me when I declare that whatever expressions may have fallen from my lips were forced from me by the interest with which I regard the coming struggle between yourself and the people."

"In these matters the Duke of Northumberland is my only adviser," returned the queen haughtily. He has risked life and fortune in my cause, and to him alone on earth do I look for protection against those who would deprive me of a throne merely for the sake of placing there a bigotted Catholic whose first set would be to restore those abuses in religion which the wisdom of our fathers have swept away."

"But the duke," answered Renard, "is the last person upon whom you should rely under present circumstances. His overbearing conduct has excited against him the fierce wrath of the whole nation, and already people begin to take part with your rival, because they see you are merely made a stepping stone for this man's advancement to sovereign power. You start, madam—but be assured I have spoken to you only in the words of truth.

"It may be so," answered the queen, while a tear started to her eye; "I may have been advanced to serve certain purposes, yet, as the regal dignity was never of my own seeking, I can lay it down without regret whenever it may become necessary to do so."

"But it can only be laid down with your life unless you seize the present moment to do so," replied Renard.

"Alas! wept the lovely queen, is my rival then so lost to humanity that she would stain her soul with the blood of one who could no longer injure her.

"I pretend not to answer for Mary's future actions," replied Simon Renard, "but there have been omens that declare the fate of the Lady Jane Grey, and it is to implore her to avert that doom which has induced me to seek for this interview."

"What omen do you speak of?" demanded the queen eagerly.

"The axe falling at your feet in this very place, was a warning that should not be despised," replied the ambassador. "Heaven sent the omen for your rescue, and surely you will not turn away from it with unbelief?"

"Hah! and how didst thou know of it?" demanded Jane earnestly. "I was alone on that occasion, and my lips have never uttered a syllable of that fearful adventure."

"It matters not how I know it," replied Renard; "you see I am acquainted with the circumstance, and let that for the present content you."

The agitation of the queen's manner now drew the attention of her domestics to the speakers, and believing that their presence was required they advanced a few paces nearer, to be in readiness, should their interference be rendered necessary. In the meantime, however, Renard proceeded, without observing their movement towards him, and laying his hand upon the queen's arm, he said :—

"The moment has now arrived when delay would but endanger the cause of your rival to the throne; a vast army of Mary's adherents is ready to march direct upon London, and before many hours are passed away, the headless trunk of Northumberland, and perhaps your own also, will lie in the dark vaults beneath the place where we now stand."

"Leave me, sir," exclaimed the queen, shrinking back from his touch, and regarding him with a look of authority. "Leave me, I say, and never again dare to intrude upon the presence of her you would thus terrify into the desertion of her cause.'

"When I find that my presence here can do no good, I will leave you," answered the Spaniard. "My present business was to warn you of the dangers which a longer possession of the crown would surely entail, and therefore do I once more declare that your own death is inevitable, unless you instantly resign all pretensions to the sovereign rule of this nation, and at the same time banish from your presence for ever the rebellious Duke of Northumberland."

"Who dares charge me with rebellion?" exclaimed the nobleman, last named, who at the moment strode into the chapel, attended by a numerous band of faithful adherents, upon whose friendship he could implicitly rely, "Who, I again ask, besides yourself, Simon Renard, would presume to affix upon the name the brand of infamy?"

"You have heard my words," answered the Spaniard, in a tone of scorn that he did not attempt to conceal, "and are welcome to make what use you please of them. I am ready to repeat them, if you please, but never will I retract a single expression that may serve to convey the utter contempt in which I hold thee."

"Hah!" is there none here who dares to arrest the traitor who has thus insulted me?" roared the duke.

"Nay, traitor I am none," answered Renard, unmoved by the fury of his antagonist. "Towards thyself, I am a fierce and implacable enemy; but for her whom thou hast brought into peril by thy overreaching ambition, I feel so much pity that I would gladly withdraw her from the thraldom with which thou hast surrounded her. Thou hast called me traitor, Northumberland, but few there are, I believe, who do not regard thee as a rebellious peer, whose life is justly forfeited to the outraged laws of his country."

"Dog!" roared the duke, " drawing forth his sword, "thine insolence should have cost thee dear, had it been any other than holy ground on which we stand!"

"Since your grace is so considerate," answered Renard, with the coolness for which he was distinguished, "we will withdraw from hence and measure weapons where no such obstacle can exist. Follow me, and let this quarrel be ended with the blood of one or both of us!"

"Hold!" cried Queen Jane, throwing herself between them;—"forbear, I implore you both! This anger is most unseemly in a temple dedicated to our holy religion, and I call upon ye both to sheath your weapons ere this violence proceeds to any further length."

"Your majesty would do well to retire from this place," exclaimed Northumberland fiercely;—"yonder Spaniard has challenged me to single combat, and as an Englishman, I cannot turn away from him ike a cur."

"Nevertheless, it is my command that this quarrel ceases," cried the queen.

"Never, but with the death of one of us!" muttered the duke.

"Methinks your grace strangely forgets yourself," cried Jane, with more than her usual firmness. "The time has been when a sovereign's command was law, and yet you hesitate to obey her whom you have sworn allegiance to."

"Humph!" ejaculated Northumberland, "but my oath binds me not to put up with the insults of yon intermeddling foreigner. The honour of a man is in his own keeping, and I for one, will never acknowledge the right even of a sovereign, to interfere between me and my enemy.

"These words smack of treason," observed Renard to the Earl of Pembroke, who was standing near him. "In my country, where the honour of the crown is carefully guarded, one half of those words would have cost the utterer his head."

"Your majesty hears how I am bearded in your presence by this upstart foreigner!" exclaimed Northumberland, upon whom Renard's last speech had not been thrown away. "He sees that a faithful subject finds no protection where most he has a right to look for it, and therefore I am to be insulted by my enemies with impunity. But it is now time to assert my own honour, and therefore do I call upon the

Signor Renard to follow me where this quarrel may be brought to a speedy termination."

"Northumberland!" cried the queen, placing herself between him and the door by which he was about to quit the chapel; "this is the madness of rage, and must be put a stop to, ere my authority is quite overturned. By your oath so recently taken, you owe me some allegiance, and I now call upon you to declare where I am to rank you, as a friend or a rebel?"

"That will depend upon yourself," answered the fiery duke "Place your reliance upon me, and I am your friend, but interfere between me and my foe, and I know not how soon it may be that I become your enemy."

"This insolence ought not to be endured!" interposed the Earl of Pembroke;—"his words prove him to be a traitor at heart, and I only wait your majesty's commands to arrest him on a charge of treason."

"Hold!" cried the queen, terrified at the scene she was thus compelled to witness; "we have need of caution in this grievous business, and I would rather convince the Duke of Northumberland of his error by mild measures, than take a step which might afterwards bring him to the headsman's axe." Then addressing herself to the Duke in a whisper, she said; "for the love of heaven, my lord, let this unseemly quarrel end ere worse comes of it. The Signor Renard is no friend of yours, and the present occasion may afford him an opportunity of hurrying on that ruin which his soul thirsts for."

"Ask me not to succumb to him," cried the Duke fiercely. "Already have I been disgraced enough by the part your majesty has been pleased to take against me this day, and it now remains for myself to wipe away the foul stain of dishonour with his blood. He shall die I say, even though my sword's point had to reach his heart through yours!"

"Shall your faithful subjects stand by and hear these words addressed to your majesty?" exclaimed Pembroke, glad of any opportunity that offered to hasten the downfall of his rival.

"What is it you would do my lord of Pembroke?" asked the terrified queen.

"Arrest him on a charge of treasonable words spoken in our own hearing," answered the nobleman.

"You speak, my lord, as if I was powerless in your hands," exclaimed Northumberland with an expression of contempt.

"I speak," returned the Earl of Pembroke, "as a friend of the queen should ever address himself to her enemies."

"Oh, I understand your motives perfectly well, my lord," answered the Duke with a sneer; "you seek my downfall that you may the more readily compass the destruction of her whose part you pretend to take. But I warn you, Jane, to beware of these men who are now thrusting themselves so eagerly forward in order to displace me. Their motives are too thinly glossed over to deceive me, and if heaven only spares me for a few days longer, I shall be able to produce such evidence of their own treacherous designs as will insure for them all the heavy doom they are so desirous to see fall upon myself."

"'Tis well to throw the odium upon others in order to shield yourself," cried Simon Renard, alarmed lest the words of the Duke should awake the queen to a real sense of the danger she was in from those who were now professing to be her friends. "His Grace of Northumberland," he continued, "knows the blackness of his own heart, and he would now divert your majesty's attention by turning your heart from those who respect and would protect you."

“Villain!” muttered Northumberland; “this hypocrisy surpasses lief; but thine arts shall not avail thee, for I am not yet powerless, d thou shalt be made to feel the pangs of the wolf even though it may ance to be in his last death struggles with his hunter.”

“Peace, Northumberland, I implore you!” again interposed the een. “Be friends, if ye can, or if ye will not do this, at least, forear any more of these wild outbreakings of anger that savours more of vage life than the society in which a Queen of England should find erself.”

“For my own part,” replied the Duke of Northumberland, “I canidly admit that neither time nor circumstances will ever efface from y memory the insults I have this day received from this proud Spaiard. He has roused my hatred, and vengeance shall some time or ther be amply satisfied.”

“Again, my lord!” cried the queen with anger.

“Oh, never heed him,” answered Renard with provoking coolness. His words are harmless as the summer winds, and at all events he has ne to deal with who neither fears to meet him now or at any other me.”

“This insolence shall meet its punishment,” exclaimed the Duke of orthumberland—“nay, more, I tell thee——”

“Peace, my lord, I beseech you,” interposed the queen.

“Nay, hear me, Jane——”

“Not now, my Lord Duke,” cried her majesty; “you are both too arm at present to carry this foolish affair any further. At the council hich is presently to be holden, you can lay your grievances before the rds, and they, I can answer for it, will decide fairly and honourably etween you. Are you agreed in this?”

“I am for one,” exclaimed Renard.

“And I for another,” rejoined the Duke.

“Then let us now separate for the present,” said the queen;—“and et ere we part I must have your solemn promise not to carry this uarrel any further until after the council has been dissolved. Will ou pledge yourselves to obey me in this.”

“Most willingly,” answered Northumberland.

“And what says the Signor Renard?”

“That he will shortly adhere to the injunctions of the Lady Jane,” nswered the Spaniard.

“Tis well,” cried the queen assuming a more cheerful deportment at his temporary cessation of hostilities. “I rely upon your honour, and et no occasion be given to regret the faith I have thus reposed in ye.”

Having thus spoken, the queen, followed by Northumberland and the est of her train left the chapel of St. Peter, and almost immediately fterwards Simon Renard and his friends quitted the place by another oor, to consult together upon the best means by which they might epose Queen Jane, and place the Princess Mary upon the throne.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW A MEETING WAS HELD BY THE ENEMIES OF THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND, AND RESOLUTIONS EXPRESSED THREATENING THE DOWNFALL OF THEIR FOE.—BICKERING BETWEEN SIMON RENARD AND THE LORDS ON A SUBJECT THAT NEARLY CONCERNS QUEEN JANE.—ARRIVAL OF THE DWARF, AND THE ODD FIGURE HE WAS MADE TO CUT.

The chamber which had been alloted to the use of the Spanish ambassador was now filled with the conspirators who had assembled together at Renard's bidding for the purpose of consulting together upon certain important affairs connected with the business they had in hand. That Queen Jane was to be immediately deposed in favour of her rival was already decidedly agreed upon, and the only difficulty they had to surmount, was the bringing about the desired result with that secrecy which would render success certain and instantaneous. Indeed every thing promised fairly for their cause, and it merely required that the present meeting should be held in order that things should be put into a train for the speedy termination of Jane's sovereign career.

It will have been seen already that Simon Renard was one of the most active among the conspirators who had come forward to effect this change in the government of a country in which he was an alien. He had in fact been sent over by his royal master, the King of Spain, expressly to prepare and carry this plot into execution, for Renard was known to be subtle as a fiend, and utterly reckless of what lives might be sacrificed, rather than suffer a defeat in any plan that he had once set his heart upon. This qualification had secured for him the favourable notice of his sovereign, and at the first opportunity he had been sent over to England, for the purpose of checking as much as possible the progress of the Reformation, and to seize the first chance that might offer to bring the people back to the religion of their forefathers. Naturally crafty, Renard had been all along working secretly, to effect this end, and having secured the co-operation of a few of the most influential among the English nobles, he waited until the forced accession of Queen Jane to the throne gave the opportunity so much desired.

That the Princess Mary was the next in succession to the crown after Edward the Sixth, no one attempted to deny. Her religion was the only barrier that offered itself, and Northumberland, who had his own ambitious views to gratify, took care to spread reports of her bigotry and intolerance, and it was in the midst of the alarm thus created, that he dragged his unwilling daughter-in-law, the beauteous and accomplished Lady Jane Grey, to the throne which was doomed to prove her path to the scaffold and the grave. A few only were found to approve of this bold step, for the greater portion of the people immediately rallied round the standard of Mary, and thus Simon Renard found no difficulty in urging forward those plans for the accomplishment of which he had been sent over to this country by his intriguing master. Some of the most powerful of our nobles were now entrusted with his secret; many of them were Catholics who joined his cause from principle, whilst the rest were ambitious men, who willingly aided the stronger party in the certainty of afterward receiving that reward for which they greedily thirsted, Simon Renard, therefore, quickly found himself at the head of a powerful party whose object it was to dethrone Queen Jane, and thus elevate in her place one who would restore the ancient religion, even though it should be through the agency of the most diabolical cruelty.

"My lords and gentlemen," exclaimed the Spanish Ambassador, looking round upon the throng which was assembled in his apartment, "we are now near the termination of those labours which are to bring back your country to the possession of peace and prosperity. Northumberland, with all his arts, is now in the toils we have laid for him, and, with the aid of our good saints, his head shall bow to the block ere many days have passed away."

"But the lion may break through the toils, and thus escape the doom intended for him," observed the Earl of Arundel. "I have marked this man's progress, and never yet has he suffered an advantage to be taken for him without amply revenging himself upon those who have worked against him."

"True, my lord," answered Sir William Cecil, "but the star of his ascendancy is about to set, and the enemy we have so long dreaded will be rendered powerless."

"And the idol whom he has raised is doomed to fall with him," exclaimed Renard with a grim look of satisfaction. "This queen, as she is called, must no longer be suffered to usurp the place of royalty, and the grave alone will secure us against any future attempts that may be imagined for her restoration."

"Have we no remedy but death?" exclaimed the Earl of Arundel.

"None!" answered the Spaniard, sternly.

"And yet, methinks," cried the beforen-amed nobleman, "one so young and beautiful might be spared a fate that should be awarded only to the most guilty."

"In times of danger, like these, the lover of his country has nothing to do with mercy," replied Simon Renard, "her beauty may have touched the hearts of some of England's youthful chivalry, but let her admirers remember her only as a ururper, and then, if they do not rid themselves of her, your people deserve to be still trampled upon by the imperious and tyrannical Duke of Northumberland."

"But he is still in the height of his power," exclaimed the Earl of Pembroke, "and who shall say that our efforts to pull him down will be crowned with immediate success?"

"I say so," answered Renard with impatience.

"And what if thou hast miscalculated thy means?"

"I will propose nothing rashly," answered the ambassador, "and therefore, you will be able to judge how far my opinions are founded in probability. Above all things, my advise is, that we act with caution, for the net is spread, and when least suspected he will become our victim."

"And how long will it be before that end is accomplished?" asked Sir William Cecil.

"That will depend upon yourselves," answered the Spaniard. "Within this hour you may, if it so pleases your lordships, force him to an act that will throw him and the Lady Jane in our power."

"Hah!" exclaimed Arundel, "this promptness of action pleases me; it is by the rapidity of our motions that we must hope to succeed in our enterprise. But you have promised well, good Renard, and we wait to learn from your lips the means by which such important ends are to be brought about."

"At the council which is to be presently held, answered the ambassador, "the subject for consideration will be the steps that are to be taken for suppressing the rising that is every where taking place in favour of the Princess Mary. Some of you must urge the duke to accept of the office of commanding the troops which will be sent to crush what his partizans are pleased to call this insurrection. He will thus be removed sufficiently far from the person of the Lady Jane, and it will then be your own fault if both he and the pretty idol he has raised up are not for ever rendered harmless."

"I understand you," replied the Earl of Arundel, who had been an attentive listener to these words of the crafty Spaniard. "You would have us send him on this business, which he cannot very well refuse, so that when he is far off we may introduce the Princess Mary into this fortress, where she may be proclaimed queen in spite of the puny efforts of the duke to sustain his favourite in her place of power."

"You have guessed but a small portion of my meaning," answered Renard. My object is certainly to elevate the rightful heir to the crown, but more, much more must be done ere justice will have been satisfied."

"Aye, the duke must fall———"

"Nay, more," interrupted Simon Renard, "he must die!"

"He must!" exclaimed the Earl of Pembroke, "he shall meet the doom of a traitor as a warning to any other ambitious noble who may dare to follow his base example."

"My lords," cried Sir William Cecil, "there is not one among us, I believe, who would raise his voice to save the Duke of Northumberland from a fate he so well deserves for the bold step he has thought proper to take in this affair. The scaffold must be the last scene of his guilty career, yet, would I earnestly implore you to take no measures against the Lady Jane Grey, whose too yielding nature has rendered her an easy victim to this proud noble's mad schemes of ambition."

"That is a question that will be best answered by her who we are about to exalt to the throne of her ancestors," replied Renard. "When Mary becomes Queen of England she will punish those who are now her enemies with the same unsparing hand that she will reward those who have done her good service in this hour of difficulty."

"But she is revengeful," answered Pembroke, "and perhaps her first act may be to strike terror into the hearts of her foes, by sending her fallen rival to the block."

"And if she does, who shall charge her with injustice?" exclaimed the Spaniard. "Has she not been forcibly driven from her just rights, and shall we, who support her claims, murmur at any punishment she may be pleased to visit upon the head of one who has proved so dangerous a rival?"

"Nay," cried the Earl of Arundel with energy, "the life of the Lady Jane Grey must be spared, or Queen Mary may not sit so securely on her throne as her friends could wish. The brief career of Jane has not been marked by any act that would create a single enemy; she is loved even by those who regard her as a usurper, and any act of violence committed against her would serve only to weaken the affections of the people towards her persecutor, and, perhaps, England might be plunged into all the horrors of a civil war ere the spirit of dissatisfaction could be quenched."

"But the party of Queen Mary is a strong one," observed Renard."

"It is," answered Arundel, "and for that very reason she can the better afford to be merciful towards a fallen enemy. The life of the Lady Jane, I say, must be saved, or I, for one, will, from this moment, cease to take any active part against her."

"How!—Wouldst thou too be a traitor?" cried Renard fiercely.

„ I would be merciful, but no traitor," answered Arundel, regarding the Spaniard with a calm look.

"Thou speakest as one upon whom little faith is to be placed," exclaimed the ambassador with a gesture of impatience.

"And yet, Monsieur Renard," retorted the nobleman, "it may be that I shall prove more stedfast in my cause than thou dost with all thy vauntings. I demand only safety for the Lady Jane Grey, and in that demand I am joined by all those present who require not the shedding of a woman's blood to satisfy their diabolical vengeance."

"My Lord of Arundel has spoken for us all," exclaimed the Earl of Pembroke. "We are banded together for the purpose of restoring the rightful heiress to the throne, and there is not one of us who will consent to send her unfortunate rival to a bloody tomb."

"But suppose the safety of the state should demand such a sacrifice to be made," cried Simon Renard, yielding a little to the general voice. "Would you rather see our cause placed in peril than send a weak, guilty woman to that punishment which can alone save the state?"

"There can be no need of the headsman's axe," retorted Arundel, "when our strength is sufficient to protect us against further attempts that may be made to dethrone the queen of our own choice. Besides, we know that the Lady Jane Grey was from the first most anxious to remain in privacy and retirement;—an enjoyment that she never would have yielded up had it not been for the insolence and overbearing of proud Northumberland."

"And dearly shall his conduct be repaid," exclaimed Simon Renard, glad of an opportunity to change the subject. "The hunters are already at his heels, and the dark hour of his destiny has drawn nearly to a close. *His* blood, at all events, my lords, you will not hesitate to shed whenever it shall please fortune to throw him completely into our power?"

"We have already said that he has drawn down upon himself the penalty of death!" answered the Earl of Pembroke. "Towards that man, proud and domineering as he has proved, we can entertain little other feeling than revenge for the past, and a punishment fully commensurate with the magnitude of his crimes. It has pleased him, in the plenitude of his power, to make us prisoners here in this fortress;—we are to remain here, it seems, during his pleasure, but little does he reckon upon the fate which his own arbitrary conduct has hurried on!"

"Hush, my lords, we are interrupted!" exclaimed Renard, as a loud rapping was heard at the door, and then proceeding to open it, Hugh, the gigantic warder, strode in bearing in his arms the dwarf, who, without further ceremony he proceeded to place upon the table, round which the partizans of Mary were asssembled. A loud burst of laughter followed this, and when the gravity of the lords was somewhat restored, Christopher Dumps strode across to that part the table where Renard was seated, and addressing himself to the Spaniard he announced that the council had met, and that the presence of the lords was commanded by Queen Jane, who had already taken her place at the head of the board. At this intimation all rose, and even Simon Renard who, as a foreigner had no business there, followed the rest in order to watch those proceedings upon which hung the destinies of Northumberland.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT PASSED AT THE COUNCIL, AND HOW NORTHUMBERLAND WAS FORCED TO ACCEPT AN OFFICE HE HAD NO WISH FOR.—HOW QUEEN JANE IS PLOTTED AGAINST BY HER FOES, AND THE BLINDNESS WITH WHICH SHE FALLS INTO THEIR SNARES.—NORTHUMBERLAND QUITS THE PRESENCE OF HIS SOVEREIGN.

During the interval that they were waiting for the assembly of all the lords of the council, Queen Jane was talking in an under tone to the Duke of Northumberland, who was standing on the right hand of the throne, and whose manner betrayed evident tokens of the restless uneasiness which some recent events had caused him. The queen, too, appeared to be more than usually agitated, for her whisperings were uttered rapidly, and her bosom seemed to heave as if her mind was tortured with the apprehension of some new perils arising out of the unenviable position to which she had been exalted by the rash ambition of her kinsman. When all were assembled, however, the duke drew her attention to the business which had called them together, and then rising from her seat she said with emotion:—

"My lords, I have found it necessary to call you together in order that we may devise means of safety against the dangers with which we are threatened. You are aware of the state reasons which compelled me to accept the crown of your late king. Our religion would have been endangered had my cousin Mary succeeded her brother, and it was on that consideration alone that I yielded to the earnest solicitations of those who have the welfare of the nation at heart. Yet, Heaven knows how reluctantly I accepted the glittering offer, and even now, could I do so with safety, I would return the sceptre into the hands of those who gave it under my care, and retire once more to that privacy which alone has charms for me. But alas! this is no time for indulging selfish considerations; we are threatened with a rebellious rising in all parts of our dominions. Many of our nobles have flocked round the person of the Princess Mary, and I fear the consequences of my accepting the crown will be the bloodshed and slaughter of those I would willingly lay down my life to save."

"Will your majesty give the rebels battle?" asked the Earl of Arundel?"

"Such is the hard necessity I am driven to," replied the queen. "My chief advisers have declared that the greatest peril is to be apprehended from indecision, and I, therefore, though sorely against my will, have consented to send out troops for the suppression of this rebellion."

"A most prudent resolution," observed Sir William Cecil; "the peace of the nation should be first cared for, and it is most important that your majesty should choose some experienced warrior upon whom to confer the comamnd of an army, the success of whose operations is so important to the destinies of the dominion you have been called upon to govern."

"I have given that subject the most careful consideration," answered Jane, "and the result is that the command be intrusted to the Duke of Suffolk; a soldier of well tried courage, and whose experience in military affairs holds out fair hopes that the insurrection will be crushed at a blow, and thus the lives of many of my subjects may be spared. How say you, my lords, does my choice meet your approbation?"

replied Arundel. "There are few better men in your majesty's dominion, and yet I could have wished another party had been named for this important duty."

"To who do you allude?" asked the queen.

"The Duke of Northumberland."

"Hah!" exclaimed Jane, with surprise; "you have named one whom the world says you hate, and yet, you would entrust to him a duty on which the fate of this kingdom may depend."

"My hatred for the man does not blind me to his merits as a soldier," answered the Earl of Arundel. "It is the general wish that the command should be entrusted to him, and where confidence in his abilities is thus exhibited it is to be hoped he will not refuse an honour which may bring upon him the gratitude of his country."

"How say you, my Lord of Northumberland?" exclaimed Jane, addressing herself to that nobleman. "You have heard the wishes of our friends, and I would fain know whether your grace will accede to them."

"The wish has been expressed by one who bears me no good will," answered Northumberland haughtily, "and therefore, I refuse to take upon myself this command, knowing, as I well do, that some hidden mischief is concealed beneath all this show of graciousness."

"You refuse it, then?" cried the queen.

"For the present, at least, I do," replied the duke. "Your majesty has already named the Duke of Suffolk as the leader of your forces, and scarcely could an abler general have been found among all your commanders. He has already evinced his prowess in the field, the soldiers love him as a friend, and therefore, I see no reason why these lords should wish to alter your arrangements, unless, indeed, it be to deprive your majesty of my presence."

"He has guessed our motives," whispered Renard to Sir William Cecil, "and the chances are that he will prefer remaining near the queen."

"Then must we urge him till he yields," replied the statesman he had addressed. "All depends upon his being immediately removed from this place, and be it therefore, your task to urge the queen not to accept of any refusal."

The Earl of Arundel, too, saw that all their schemes were lost unless he could immediately turn the advantage in his own favour, and once more addressing himself to the duke he said:—

"When the interest of one's country is so greatly at stake as in the present instance, it behoves every man to sacrifice all private feelings and to embrace the cause of his sovereign as if he was about to fight for his own life or liberty. On that consideration, therefore, do I again urge your grace to lead the army which is to relieve us from the dread we entertain of the Princess Mary's success in raising the rebellious people against the queen who we have all of us sworn to protect in the exalted station to which she has been called."

"I see thy motives, Arundel," replied the duke scornfully, "thou canst not carry on thy treachery so well while I am present, and therefore, this scheme has been hatched between you and your party in order that the queen may be thrown defenceless into your hands. But I will defeat you, my lords," he continued, glancing round upon the assemblage. "I am satisfied of the honesty of your intentions, and you therefore, may rest assured that the office you would force upon me shall be bestowed where it can be better filled. The Duke of Suffolk is an old and well-tried soldier; his talent as a commander is well known, and my life for it the friends of her majesty will never have to regret the trust that is now about to be reposed in him."

"Now is the time for your majesty to be firm," whispered Renard to the queen, near whom he had stationed himself. "At present you are a prisoner in this fortress, and your only hope of escape from his clutches remains in his departure against your foes. Accept of no excuse, insist upon his heading your troops, and your own liberty will be secured."

"It shall be done," replied Jane in the same low tone, "for already do I begin to feel that I am to be made a mere stepping-stone for this proud noble's advance to power!" Then addressing herself to Northumberland she continued:—"My lord duke, I claim the fulfilment of your oft repeated promises to befriend and protect. It is to you that I owe this dangerous advance to power, and therefore do I now call upon you to accept the only duty by which you can most materially serve me."

"Your majesty knows my loyalty and regard for your person," answered the duke, "and that I would willingly sacrifice my life rather than fail in that duty which I have solemnly sworn to perform. In aught besides this I would have consented cheerfully, and even now, I will not set an example of disobedience, even though I feel assured that your cause would be far better served by entrusting the Duke of Suffolk with the duty you are so anxious to impose upon myself."

"Nay, I am resolved upon this point," replied the queen; "my husband, the Lord Guildford Dudley, has thought proper to flee from me in this hour of peril, and it is, therefore, necessary that I should retain my father here as my protector. You will, therefore, yield to him your office of the Constable of the Tower, and further, it is my command that you instantly set forth with your army to disperse those rebels who have assembled together for the purpose of raising the Princess Mary to the station I now occupy."

"Hear me, your majesty———"

"I will hear nothing, my lord duke," interrupted the queen hastily. "My mind is fully made up on this subject, and no remonstrances will ever force me to yield when I know the consequence of your obedience."

"His grace of Northumberland is modest on the subject of his own importance," exclaimed the Earl of Arundel in a tone of bitter irony.

"Say rather that he sees through the designs of his enemies, and would avert the mischief they are plotting," answered Northumberland emphatically. "However," he continued, "I will prove my loyalty to the queen, and, since she wills it, the honour I have been offered is accepted."

"Then, I am to understand that your grace is ready to place yourself at the head of my troops?" cried Jane.

"I am ready to perform your majesty's commands," answered the duke. "You will still find me faithful and loyal, which is more than I can say for the majority of those by whom you are now unfortunately surrounded."

"What mean you by that, my lord duke?" whispered Pembroke fiercely.

"That there are traitors present!" answered the nobleman, undaunted by the threatening gestures of his enemy.

"Indeed!"—and who are they?—Methinks if any such be here it is your duty to point them out, that the queen may take steps for securing her own safety."

"My lords, I command you to desist!" cried Jane, who had observed the angry looks that had been exchanged between these inveterate enemies; "at this moment the country requires your services, and the least division among my friends may bring upon us ruin and bloodshed, when we should rather seek to avert the horrors which civil war must of necessity bring in its train. Upon you, Northumberland, I chiefly rely in this difficult situation; you have been the chief means of raising me to an unwished-for throne, and upon your energy must I principally rely for a victory over the faction which has risen up for my destruction."

"His grace has already accepted the command of your troops, madam," exclaimed the Earl of Arundel, "and from former experience there is little doubt but he will soon be able to restore peace and content among all your subjects."

"Northumberland has fallen into the snare we have laid for him," whispered Renard to the Earl of Pembroke. "He has consented to leave the Lady Jane in our hands, and it will be our own fault if the Princess Mary is not on the throne of her ancestors before another week has passed away."

"Your grace," said the queen, addressing herself to Northumberland, "shall have our warrant authorising you to perform the office of commander of our troops. It shall be sent after you immediately, and if our cause be—as I believe it is,—the just one, may heaven send us a speedy and bloodless victory over our enemies."

"My zealous loyalty shall be exerted to the utmost to secure a conquest for your majesty," answered the Duke, and then looking sternly round upon the nobles seated at the council table, he continued with marked emphasis;—"but there are many here who will understand me when I say that my absence has been procured by those who eagerly seek my ruin, that they may the more surely effect the destruction of the sovereign they have sworn to protect, and maintain in the exalted position to which she has been raised. When I am gone they will the more openly exhibit the black baseness that actuates them, every opportunity of serving their own traitorous purposes will be instantly laid hold of, and she, even, whom they now profess to support, will be made to feel the direful effects of their treachery. Nay, my lords, it is in vain that ye regard me thus fiercely; I have spoken but the truth, and well ye know it;—but beware, for the tiger at bay is far more dangerous to the hunters than when the way is free and open before him."

Having uttered these words, Northumberland threw himself at the foot of the throne, kissed the hand of the queen, and then rising again from his lowly position, he hurried out of the council chamber, leaving the hapless queen to the tender mercies of those upon whose promises of affection she had so weakly relied. A smile of exultation might have been seen curling many a lip as he thus abruptly departed, and the freequent whisperings that took place among those he had left behind, showed that they were already preparing to put their treacherous schemes into execution.

But Queen Jane was too much absorbed in her own reflections, to observe these evident manifestations of danger to herself, and at last rousing herself from the reverie into which she had fallen, she quitted the throne, and curtseying to the assembly, hurriedly retired from their presence.

In less than an hour from that time the Duke of Northumberland had set forward to place himself at the head of the troops which were to protect Jane against the enemies who had flocked together under the banners of the Princess Mary. But though crowds of people had collected together in the streets to witness his departure, he was every where received with chilling coldness, and in some instances he could hear the dissatisfaction expressed by those who in their hearts wished for the failure of his enterprize, in order that Jane's rival might immediately assume that position from whence it was their opinion she had been unjustly driven. All these signs of evil omen were not unnoticed by the Duke of Northumberland, and, followed by his numerous retinue, he urged his way onward, despairing of that success which could alone save him from the vengeance of an enraged people.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GILBERT HEMMINGSLEY BEGINS TO DESPAIR OF EFFECTING HIS ESCAPE FROM THE HANDS OF MARTIN FETTERLOCK.—AN ATTEMPT AT SELF-DESTRUCTION PREVENTED BY THE APPEARANCE OF CRAZY ALICE.—MARTIN FETTERLOCK AND HIS VICTIMS.—THE ESQUIRE MEETS WITH A GOOD OPPORTUNITY, AND FAILS NOT TO TURN IT TO HIS OWN ADVANTAGE.—HOW TO TURN THE TABLES ON A GAOLER.

MEANWHILE, the imprisonment of Gilbert Hemmingsley became irksome in the extreme. Hour after hour passed away, and no relief had yet arrived from his master, whose inactivity surprised him, if indeed he had yet learnt the dilemma to which his faithful squire had fallen. But the more he thought of these things the more perplexed he became, and the solitude and darkness which he was doomed constantly to suffer made him over and over again pray for death, as the only means of escape from the misery to which he had been doomed. His only visitor was Martin Fetterlock, who occasionally came to supply him with bread and water, but on each occasion of his appearance, he maintained the strictest silence, refusing to return any answer to the repeated questions of his prisoner, as to what punishment he was doomed to suffer, or whether his captivity was to end only with his life. At times a malignant smile of mingled scorn and triumph passed over the stern features of the gaoler, yet even in these moments of gratified revenge he would maintain his taciturnity, and then hastily snatching up his lamp, would hurry away, leaving the wretched captive a prey to the most intense agony and suspense.

Gilbert found this very terrible to bear, and when, at last, it appeared that no chance remained of contriving to escape the ever watchful vigilance of his guardian, he began to devise means for the release of himself from the pangs he now endured by means of death. In the madness of his despair he rose from the heap of straw that served him for a bed, and pacing up and down his gloomy dungeon as far as the length of his chain, he inwardly prayed forgiveness of Heaven for the act of violence he was about to commit. Then again, the thought of all he might have to endure rushed upon his mind; the madness of despair rushed upon his brain, and stepping back to the full extent of his bonds he rushed head foremost with terrific violence against the wall of his dungeon! Stunned by the force of the blow Gilbert fell heavy upon the damp floor of his cell, and on recovering from the stupor that followed this desperate attempt on his life, he found himself lying at full length, whilst a woman of wild and haggard appearance was hanging anxiously over him and watching with intense solicitude the result of those applications which she had used for his recovery. By the feeble rays of the lamp which she held in her hand he could perceive that he was indebted for all this care to a stranger, and by the vacant countenance of his preserver he saw but too plainly that her intellects had given way to the severe trials she had been made to undergo. He then remembered the fearful shrieks that had each night disturbed his slumbers, and believing that in this strange visitor he beheld some unfortunate captive like himself, he sprang up from his heap of straw, and, seizing her by the hand, eagerly demanded who she was, and the reason of his now finding her in his cell.

"Hush!" cried the poor creature, placing a finger on her lips in token that they might be overheard; "speak not above your breath or they will come and drive poor Alice away to punish her with more of their cruel tortures. Be silent, I say, for you know not yet the fiends into whose hateful clutches you have fallen."

"Alas! I know the villain and his motives but too well," answered Gilbert Hemmingsley; "Martin Fetterlock is the author of all my present misery, and his jealousy has driven him to throw me into this vile dungeon from whence the voice of the captive cannot be made to reach those, who, if they knew his situation, would gladly fly to set him free."

"Martin Fetterlock!—is he then your enemy?"

"He is."

"And mine also," cried the poor creature, burying her face in her hands, and groaning aloud, for not a tear could she shed to ease her burning brain.

"Thou art his captive then?"

"Aye, for a many and many a long, weary year," replied the poor creature. "Winter and summer pass away, the seasons change, and gladness sometimes finds its way to the heart of even the most unhappy. But poor, crazy Alice knows no joy; all is a weary blank to her, for they have robbed her of the child of her affections; they have made her desolate!"

"Who hath done this?" demanded Gilbert Hemmingsley.

"Martin Fetterlock," she replied;—"he who is now the master of your destinies, and who, in the solitude of this dreary cell, possesses the power of destroying his victim without fear of punishment for his crime. But my brain wanders from what should now be my first care;—I found you but a short time since lying pale and insensible on the ground;—your groans woke me to a sense of your sufferings, and creeping through yonder aperture in the wall, I came to render what aid I could to one whose sufferings are perhaps equal to my own."

"My sufferings are more in the mind than in the body," answered Gilbert. "Stung by what I have endured a sudden frenzy seized upon my brain, and desiring to release myself from the sharp tortures of suspense I madly sought for death by rushing against yonder wall."

"Ah, you bleed!" cried Alice, as she perceived a stream of gore proceeding from a wound in his head.

"Nay, the injury is not great," answered Gilbert. "In the dark I must have struck myself obliquely against the wall, and thus my life has been preserved when I would gladly have thrown it away as a load too heavy for longer endurance. But hush, some one comes this way!—doubtless it is my gaoler, and should you be discovered here it might only lead to greater severities than he has already heaped upon you."

"Let him strike me dead, and I will thank him for it with my latest breath!" cried Alice. "But no, no, he exults in the miseries I endure, and my death would only serve to shorten a pleasure which he would not yield up for all the earth contains. Martin Fetterlock is a demon, but he delights not in blood when he can secure a greater triumph by compelling his victim to live on in the endurance of prolonged misery."

At this moment the great chain that passed over the door fell with a heavy crash, and ere Gilbert could prevail upon the maniac to fly from the place, Martin Fetterlock entered, bearing in his hands a pitcher of water and a dry crust of bread, which was the only fare with which he thought fit to supply his prisoner. As he perceived Alice he started with surprise, and then advancing towards her he placed the things he had brought with him upon the ground, preparatory to seizing upon his unfortunate victim and dragging her to some other dungeon from whence she would be less likely to extend her rambles, as she had done in the present instance. But the poor maniac saw the motives that actuated him, and uttering a wild scream of terror, she sank upon her knees imploring him to have pity upon one whom he had so long tortured with his cruelties. Martin Fetterlock, however, was not to be subdued by prayers and intreaties, and he was again about to grasp her in his infernal clutches, when Gilbert, gathering up a portion of the chain in his hands, held the massive burden above his head, and threatened to dash it into the face of his gaoler unless he instantly retreated from his still sobbing victim. Fetterlock saw by the resolution of the esquire that his own chance of safety depended on compliance, and stepping back a pace or two, he said sullenly:—

"By St. Julian! but the air of these dungeons seems to possess a marvellous property to drive people out of their senses. Are you mad, Master Hemmingsley, that you would threaten me in this way, seeing that I have the power to shorten that chain of yours, and thus abridge the little liberty I was disposed to indulge you with?"

"I am not mad, though you would fain make me so," answered Gilbert. "Chance has placed a weapon in my hands, and while this poor creature kneels at my feet imploring protection, I will not fail to wield it in her defence, even though I should be compelled to spatter these walls with the blood of a human creature."

"Psha! you are over hasty in this business," exclaimed Martin Fetterlock, assuming an appearance of good nature that was foreign to his soul;—"Alice has been under my care for many years, and it is hardly to be expected that I now seek to injure her when such frequent opportunities have occurred for doing so if I had wished it."

"Believe him not!" cried Alice in a tone of supplication; "he would make you believe that I have deserved this long imprisonment, when heaven knows that the only thing of which I was guilty was in—"

"Silence!" roared Martin Fetterlock;—"speak but one word in explanation of the cause that brought you under my guardianship, and both you and this youngster shall die upon the instant."

"Your menaces, Martin Fetterlock, as far as I am myself concerned, terrify me not," cried the poor maniac. "I would gladly find a termination of my sorrows in death, and if I hold my tongue at your bidding, it is only that I will not involve this young man in the same peril with which you have threatened me."

"Heed not me, but speak boldly in spite of all his threats," exclaimed Gilbert Hemmingsley. "Say who thou art, and why thou hast been made to suffer thus long through the tyranny of this man, and doubt not but heaven will raise up an instrument to punish thy cruel persecutor."

"Mad as she is, Alice will hardly venture to excite my wrath as thou advisest," answered the gaoler exultingly.

"Why dost thou persist in calling me Alice?" cried the poor creature in a tone of remonstrance,—"thou knowest it is but a name of thine own giving, whilst that which belonged to me when first I entered this gloomy prison has been carefully withheld, as if the very sound might raise up friends of whom thou mightest have just reason to dread the vengeance that will one day fall upon thee."

"Ah!" exclaimed Gilbert eagerly, "tell me thy real name then;—nay, fear not, Martin Fetterlock, for I here tell him to his face that, villain as he is, he dare not spill our blood—speak—thy name, thy name—"

"Pronounce it not woman!" roared Martin, plucking forth his rapier and threatening her with instant death if she dared to disobey his command;—"pronounce it not, I say, or thine own doom, and that of Gilbert Hemmingsley is sealed upon the instant."

"I—I—forget," stammered forth Alice, fearful of provoking the gaoler to assassinate her fellow prisoner;—"my brain has been consumed by the fire of madness; and the many, many long years of captivity I have been made to endure, have altogether driven it from my recollection. And yet, I well remember my little daughter; my loved child who was born in yon gloomy dungeon, but whose first smile was the last that ever gave rapture to a suffering mother's heart. Alas! alas! who but a parent can tell the sufferings I have endured on my poor babe's account?"

"She died then?" exclaimed Gilbert,

"Aye, or at least so they so they told me," announced the unhappy mother. "She was carried away from me under pretence that she should be restored again immediately, but when they came back the child was not with them and oh, misery, misery, they told me she was dead!"

"Aye, aye," exclaimed Martin Fetterlock, "they told you truly, for I myself saw the poor babe expire, and it was thought better that you should not see it for fear of preventing your recovery."

"That was merciful too!" cried Gilbert ironically. "You first drag the hapless mother to a prison, and then fear to let her see her dead child lest it should break her heart, and thus cheat you out of your promised vengeance."

"Bah! this moralizing don't at all suit me," exclaimed the gaoler impatiently. "I have brought your food, and so far my business is finished with you for the present. So, come, Alice, you must away with me, for too much has already been said, and dearly would you both have paid for it only that I know you can neither contrive to escape my clutches, so that there is little fear of any mischief coming from your foolish babbling. Away with me, and let us see whether means cannot be devised in future to prevent these meetings that may end in some scheme or other to escape."

And, so saying, he passed his arm round her waist, and before either Alice or Gilbert were aware of what he was going to do, she was borne from the room and the door was again locked with all the precautions that were customary to prevent the flight of the prisoner.

When the excitement caused by this scene had passed away, Gilbert Hemmingsley began to feel the effects of the blow he had received when he made the rash attempt to destroy himself by casting himself head foremost against the wall of his dungeon. A faintness that he had not felt before crept over him; his brain spun round from loss of blood, and falling heavily to the floor, he lay for some time without sense or motion.

It was long after this when he recovered himself, and the first thing of which he was aware was the presence of Martin Fetterlock, who, believing him to be dead, had removed the chain from his body, and was now in the act of removing him from the prison, in order to cast him into some hole or other where his body would remain undiscovered until all traces of his persecutor should be entirely lost. In an instant Gilbert Hemmingsley suspected that some such design was intended against him, and throwing himself violently from the grasp of his unrelenting enemy, he suddenly snatched the dagger which Martin Fetterlock usually carried in his girdle, and then rushing with frantic speed towards the door he exclaimed :—

"Now, fiend, it is my turn to triumph;—thou art in my power, Martin Fetterlock, and, for a time, at least, thou shall know the misery of captivity, even as thou has taught the bitter lesson to me."

"What means all this frantic violence?" cried the gaoler, concealing his rage under a mask of perfect innocence. "I came to do thee a benefit, and thou would'st return it with an act of the basest perfidy!—What is it, Gilbert Hemmingsley, that thou art going to do?"

"To lock the wild beast in his own proper den," answered the esquire, brandishing his dagger as a warning for Martin to keep at a respectful distance. "Thou hast so far had the advantage on thine own side; a lucky chance has given me a prospect of liberty, and by Heavens, I will die rather than submit myself tamely into your hands."

"Nay, thou hast wronged me, most foully wronged me," cried the hypocritical gaoler. "I came hither thinking to set thee at liberty, seeing thou hast so long suffered imprisonment, and yet, thou would'st basely repay me with ingratitude."

"I will but repay thee in thine own coin," answered Gilbert, unmoved by the specious words of his vindictive rival. "Each day when thou hast visited me I have implored to be released from this wretched dungeon; thou didst only mock at me for my pains, exulting in the misery thou didst bring upon me, and triumphing in the certainty that Sybilla must become thy bride, because I was no longer able to protect her from thine accursed insults. I have marked your fiendish looks of exultation, Martin Fetterlock, and yet thou thinkest to impose upon me by these hollow professions

of friendship. But know, hypocrite, that thine arts will utterly fail thee, and here thou shalt remain till Sybilla has been removed far away from thy reach."

"Hah!" exclaimed Martin Fetterlock, stung by these words, dost thou believe that it is in thy power thus easily to cheat me of my promised prize. By hell! thou hast excited in me the rage of a fiend, and thus do I resume the advantage of which thou hast momentarily deprived me."

As he uttered these words, the enfuriated Martin Fetterlock darted with a sudden spring upon the esquire, and then ensued a struggle which for some time was extremely uncertain in its results. Both knew that life or death, liberty or perpetual imprisonment depended upon the vigour with which they fought for the superiority, and with desperate hate they grappled with one another, resolved rather to perish on the spot than yield while there was a possibility of coming off victorious.

The chief aim of Fetterlock, was to deprive his adversary of the poinard with which he had so unexpectedly armed himself, while, on the other hand, Gilbert Hemmingsley resolved to part with the weapon only with his life. It was for the possession of this that they both strove with such deadly fury, and for some time it was doubtful upon which side victory would declare itself. Gilbert, however, was the first to feel his strength failing him, but as he still grasped the weapon with a desperate energy, he resolved not to relinquish his hold whilst the least chance remained of proving the victor. But on his side strength relaxed the efforts of Martin Fetterlock become more and more desperate, till at last one only way remained by which he could hope to secure the liberty for which he had so vigorously fought. This was to wound his antagonist, who would thus be compelled to relax his hold and thus afford him a chance of escaping from the dungeon.

Circumstanced as he was, this appeared to him to be his only alternative, and having contrived by one last effort to release his right hand in which the instrument of death was still clutched, he raised the glittering blade aloft, and ere Martin Fetterlock could ward off the blow, the steel had entered his side, and he fell bleeding to the earth!

This then was the moment to escape, and as Gilbert knew that the wound was not likely to prove fatal, he hurried from the dungeon in which he left the gaoler, and turning the key, he proceeded down the dark vaulted passage towards a faint light which he perceived at the extreme end. Here, however, he was doomed to be disappointed in his newly raised hope of liberty, for the window which gave light to the stone chamber, in which he now found himself, was small, and placed far above his reach. In vain he tried to clamber up in order that he might try to enlarge the aperture, and thus free himself from captivity;—the height at which it was situated utterly precluded all hope of escape by that means, and turning away with bitter disappointment, he hastened down another passage, hoping that that might be the one by which the gaoler had just before approached the cell in which he had been confined.

But still he was doomed to endure disappointment after disappointment, for the way only led to numerous other dungeons, all of which were fortunately untenanted, but nowhere could he discover any way by which he might release himself from the dreary vaults he had been so long traversing in vain. This filled him with fresh alarm, for it appeared that he now had completely lost his way, and the probability was, that he was doomed to perish there, far away from the inhabited part of the Tower, and thus was cut off from all communication with those who would have flown to his rescue, had his unfortunate situation been known.

Thus perilously situated, he thought of returning to the dungeon he had left, in order that he might make a bargain with Martin Fetterlock, to give him his liberty on condition that he would guide him through the intricate passages to a place of safety. This, it is true, considering the treachery of the gaoler, was not unattended with danger to himself, and unwilling as he was to trust himself again to the mercy of such a villain, he resolved to make one more to release himself without relying upon the aid of one who had so recently sought to destroy him. With this determination he groped with his hands round the rugged walls of the dark subterranean vault, and coming at last to a door which seemed to yield even to the slightest touch, he put forth his strength, and instantly the half decayed timber gave way, and he found himself in a spacious crypt faintly illuminated by a light that seemed to shine from above, at the very further extremity. As he advanced, the various objects about him became more and more distinct;—he could see that the roof was supported with massive pillars, from whence sprang arches that ran from end to end something like those that divide the aisles from the body or nave of a church. As he approached the aperture through which the light streamed, he could see on either side of him heaps of coffins; some already crumbling to decay, and others that appeared to have been placed there but recently. At first he was appalled at this sight, but on shaking off the momentary alarm that had seized him, he conceived that this was in all probability the burial vault belonging to St. Peter's Chapel, and that therefore his escape was now almost certain. Inspired with this hope he now hurried forward to examine the opening which had been the means of guiding him thus far, but on reaching the place, his disappointment may be imagined when he found that the opening in the roof was so far above his reach as to exclude all hopes of effecting his retreat by that way.

This was indeed a heavy blow to one who thus saw all chances of retreat effectually cut off; and in the first moments of his despair he could have thrown himself upon the ground and yielded to the despair that filled his heart. But at this instant another thought struck him,—the coffins with which the place abounded might be so arranged as to raise him to the required height, and though there was something revolting in the task he proposed for himself, yet, after a moment's reflection, he set about the necessary labour, and having drawn some of the coffins exactly under the aperture, he piled others over, one upon another, until he had raised a platform sufficiently high to place him within reach of the opening that led up into the chapel. Mounting therefore over the last tenements of many a mortal creature like himself, he gained the aperture, and springing up found himself in the sacred edifice which had so recently been the scene of Queen Jane's alarm. Here, however, he had scarcely been a moment when he was startled at the sound of approaching footsteps, and, at the same instant, he perceived advancing towards him, two persons earnestly engaged in conversation. Not wishing to be discovered, he glided unperceived behind one of the largest pillars, from whence he could both see and hear all that was going forward.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW A LITTLE MAN MAY BECOME A VERY SERIOUS OBSTRUCTION IN THE WAY OF A GREAT ONE.—CLASHING INTERESTS NOT EASILY TO BE RECONCILED.—A SECRET VISIT TO THE FAIR WIDOWS, IN WHICH CHRISTOPHER DUMPS MEETS WITH A VERY AUKWARD ADVENTURE.—RIVALRY BETWEEN THE DWARF AND THE GIANT.—AN INVITATION.

"Why what the deuce ails thee, man?" exclaimed Peter, the gigantic brother of Hugh, as he met little Christopher Dumps, walking solitary and apparently quite abstracted, with his arms a-kimbo, and his eyes cast towards the earth as if something out of the usual way was passing through his mind. "What ails thee Kit,?" again demanded the giant, as the dwarf was passing by without heeding him. But as well might he have spoken to the winds, for the little man heard him not, and he was still continuing his thoughtful pace, when the other following him at one stride, seized the dwarf by the nape of the neck, and thus *nolens volens* brought poor Christopher's walk to a sudden termination.

"Ah! Master Peter," he cried as soon as he had somewhat recovered himself, "this meeting has fallen out most apropos. I was just lacking the counsel of a friend, and lo, thou standest before me in the very nick of time."

"Humph!" ejaculated the giant, "what foolery art thou bent on now? And yet I scarcely need ask the question either, for I can guess that thou hast got into some scrape by thine impertinence, and now thou wantest my advise to get thee clean out of it."

"On my honour thou hast thought foul wrong of me."

"*Thine* honour!" sneered the giant!—"b'y'r lady thou must have but little of that commodity, seeing that thy body,—which is not larger than a half-grown turkey cock,—has not room to contain any large stock."

"Psha!—thou'lt anger me, presently Peter."

"And what if I do?"

"I wear a sword as well as thyself, and by the soul of my great grandmother, I am not to be insulted with impunity!"

"Bah!" growled the giant,—"go to——,thou hop-o'my thumb; quit the society of men, and for the future mix more freely with the woman who should be thine only companions."

"Ah!" sighed the little man, "there is only one among the gentle sex whose society I wish to keep, and she, Peter,—yea, the truth must be told, she looked upon me with coldness and perhaps contempt."

"Then I'll be sworn the woman, whoever she may be, is blessed with a fair share of good sense."

"Say rather that she is afflicted with an over-abundant share of prejudices," exclaimed Christopher. "I have spoken to her of love, good Peter, and would you believe it,—she as good as laughed at me, and said I was a fool!"

"Then I can bear witness that she has spoken truth for once," answered the giant. "In truth, thou art a fool, and this is not the first time I have told thee so.—Nay, man, keep thy sword in its scabbard, for I should be loath to see thee make thyself a laughing stock for the people of this place, as thou hast done many a time before."

"Do you want to insult me, Peter?"

"No, thou art too insignificant for that. I would teach thee sense, if I could, but that, I fear, is impossible, seeing that thou art too obstinate ever to learn."

"Wilt thou listen to me?"

"Aye, if thou art brief in what thou hast to say."

"Well, then, thy brother Hugh hath treated me most scurvily."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Peter, "and how, I pr'ythee, has he treated thee so ill?"

"By falling in love with my mistress, and thus cheating me of a bride when I believed myself to be the happiest man alive."

"Impossible!" cried Peter, with surprise;—"Hugh is, doubtless, a great fool, but I'll never believe he would make such an ass of himself as to fall in love."

"Nevertheless, I have spoken but the truth."

"Tush! thou art joking!—Hugh fall in love! As well mightest thou have said that I myself have been struck with a pair of bright eyes."

"I tell thee thou wilt find that I have spoken nothing but the truth," answered Christopher. Hast thou not observed how his appetite hath fallen off this last day or two? How frequently he sighs—how greatly he affects solitude—and, above all, how agitated he is whenever any one happens to mention the name of the lady of his love?"

"And, pray," demanded Peter, "who is the fair lady of whom you are speaking?"

"Thou knowest Dame Tabitha Tickletrout?"

"The buxom widow thou meanest?"

"I do—is she not passing fair?"

"Aye, and fat and forty into the bargain," answered Peter, breaking forth into a loud laugh at his wit. "I have marked her because she is ever ogling at the men; and, unless I am greatly mistaken, she is looking out for a second husband quite as eagerly as thou art seeking for a wife."

"That is the very woman I will have too."

"The more's the pity," answered the giant; "for extremes in marriage never bring much happiness to either party. Why man, thou art but as a mole-hill, whilst Dame Tabitha is a mountain of goodly size."

"Yet for all that I believe she loves me."

"Why then thou art a happy man, that's all I can say about it."

"Ah!" sighed, or rather groaned Chistopher, "I should have been a happy man, but thy great unwieldy brother must needs come in my way :—he, too, affects the company of Dame Tabitha, and I tremble for the consequences."

"Psha!" exclaimed the gigantic warder; "but a moment since I understood that thou wert in high favour with the lady, and now thou must needs pour forth thy piteous lamentations as if the prize was lost to thee for ever."

"That is because I knew the sex is fickle," answered the dwarf. "Your brother Hugh has already cast sheep's eyes towards her, and for aught I know he has popped the question, that will render me the most miserable of men for the remainder of my existence."

"But perhaps the good dame may give you the preference," answered Peter, willing to keep up the joke as long as he could. "The lady may be enamoured of thy little figure, and in that case Hugh may groan his very heart out without injuring thee in thy love."

"Gad, thou art right there," replied Christopher; "the widow is not without judgment, and, as thou sayest her heart may indeed have been touched by the love and devotion I have manifested in various ways towards her."

"Oh, there's not a doubt of it," exclaimed Peter, "the woman hath eyes, and therefore thou mayest consider thyself safe."

"And yet," answered Christopher, uneasily, "when I come to think of it I am not so very safe either, thy brother is too cunning for me, good Peter, he hath stolen a march on me; nay, perhaps while I am wasting time here, he has been laying siege to the widow's heart, and won her free consent to a marriage."

"Why where is Hugh, then?" enquired the warder.

"With Dame Tabitha Tickletrout at her own lodgings on the north side of the Tower Green," answered Christopher. "I watched him there, and when I saw his monstrous form enter the door, I groaned heavily and turned away, and then I began to think that it was time for Kit Dumps to look out for another mistress."

"By St. Paul, but I should like to be a witness of his wooing," shouted Peter, till the tears rolled down his face from excessive laughter.

"Nay, an' thou really wishest it, the thing is not so difficult but what I can place thee where thou shalt overhear them love-making, without thyself being seen."

"Then know, friend Christopher, that I do wish it," replied the warder, catching eagerly at the suggestion. "The notion jumps with my humour amazingly, and if thou humourest me in this, I may perhaps, ere long, have an opportunity of serving thee in furthering thine own love-suit."

"It's a bargain! it's a bargain!" exclaimed Cnristopher, jumping about, and cutting a thousand mad capers in the extravagance of his joy. "Thou shalt see them, good Peter, thou shalt see them, I say; so all thou hast to do is to follow me, and thy curiosity will be gratified."

"So far so good," replied the warder, "but ere I move a peg from this spot let me know whither thou would'st lead me?"

"To the lodging of Dame Tabitha Tickletrout."

"But how will thou gain admittance to the apartment in which these elderly lovers are occupied in the tender *tete a tete?*"

"Oh, that will be easily managed," answered the dwarf. "The door of the room opens with a latch which we can raise without noise, and standing immediately within the chamber is a large screen, behind which we can ensconce ourselves without being observed. There thou may'st both see and hear all that goes on, and when that is done I shall claim of thee the fulfilment of our bargain."

"Which is, that I am to help thee in thine own love affairs," answered Peter. "I have not forgotten my promise, man, so now lead on, for I would not lose any part of this scene for the value of my next two years' salary."

Inspired by this promise, the dwarf again cut another of his extraordinary capers, and then arranging his dress with all the consequence of a man of importance, he twitched his companion's doublet as a hint that he was quite ready to lead him to the place whenever he should feel disposed to follow. Nor was this summons disregarded by Peter, who, rousing himself from the meditation into which he had fallen, uttered a grunt of acquiescence, and then, when his guide had got some distance in advance, he strode forward as if provided with the seven-leagued boots of the ogre, and overtook Christopher long before he had reached the spot towards which their steps was directed. At last they reached the door of the dwelling occupied by Dame Tabitha Tickletrout, and the giant was about to duck his head for the purpose of entering the portal, when little Kit seizing him by his nether garments, opposed so much resistance that the warder was obliged to step back a pace or two in order to release himself from his troublesome companion.

"What now, thou unmannered slave?" he exclaimed half angrily, "is it not enough that I have humoured thee by coming thus far on a fool's errand, but thou must take liberties that I would not put up with even if thou should measure as many feet as thou canst boast inches in thine unworthy carcase."

"Nay, now thou art growing surly, when I would only minister to thy gratification," answered Christopher. "I was but going to call your attention to the sound of voices from yonder window. Your brother's gruff tones are not to be mistaken, and as for the shrill tenor of the widow, I could answer for it were she speaking among a thousand."

"Aha! it's Hugh's voice to a certainty," exclaimed the warder, "he is making love, no doubt, and so, since you have promised to take me where I can see and hear distinctly all that passes, I now insist upon the fulfilment of your pledge, lest I suffer him to make a fool of himself, and thus leave you to flounder out of your own love affair as best you can."

"Hist! if you speak above your breath, we shall be overheard," whispered Christopher. "Be prudent, follow me as if you were stepping on eggs, and you shall find that I will not be worse than my word."

Obeying this hint the gigantic warder proceeded on tiptoe, and having entered a door which had been cautiously opened by Kit, he found himself, as the dwarf had said, behind a screen that about half crossed the apartment, and from whence, by stooping now and then, whenever the lovers' eyes were directed that way, he could satisfy both the senses of sight and hearing to his heart's content. But he was not suffered to remain in peace for any long time, for whilst he was still peeping over the screen and chuckling to himself at the fun he should have at the expense of his brother, little Kit was striving by every device he could think of to give him a hint that he should like to see what was going forward as well as himself. At length, applying the point of his rapier to the calf of the giant's dexter leg, he managed to remind him that he was not there alone, and when Peter stooped to see what sort of vermin it was that had given such a sharp sting, the little man found an opportunity to whisper a wish that he would have the civility to place him in such a situation as to enable him to see what was going forward. This the good natured warder instantly did, though it must be admitted he at first felt rather inclined to kick him out of the place, and lifting the dwarf in his arms, he held him in such a way that his head just appeared over the top of the place behind which they had sheltered themselves.

And there before them, sure enough, sat both the gigantic Hugh and the blushing widow, the latter of whom was evidently waiting till her somewhat overgrown lover should find confidence enough to deliver himself of the speech he intended to make for the purpose of declaring his own ardent passion, and at the same time drawing from her a confession that she did not regard him with indifference. But Hugh found himself in a situation of more than ordinary difficulty; in fact, love-making was not at all in his way, and instead of pouring forth words that might convey an intimation of what he really felt, he did nothing but look languishingly on the blushing widow, who, by this time, began to think he was the most diffident lover she had ever the misfortune to be troubled with.

At length, however, in a fit of desperation, Hugh seized hold of a flaggon of ale that had been placed on the table beside him, and having emptied the contents at a draught, he seemed to have imbibed fresh courage with the liquor. In fact, a desperate resolution appeared to have inspired him, for through his huge person on his knees before her, he relieved himself by a heavy groan, and then pressing the widow's hand to his lips he gave utterance to the following very eloquent speech:

"Dame Tabitha Tickletrout, I love you to distraction!"

"Lor sir, you don't say so!" cried the lady, with as much modesty as a widow could be expected to assume.

"But I do say so," answered Hugh, thumping his breast with uncommon vehemence; "I do say so, I tell you, and what's more I shall be an undone warder unless you take pity on my unfortunate condition."

"Ah! but you men are such deceitful creatures!"

"Some may be so, I grant," answered the love-inspired Hugh, 'there are men whose vows are not to be depended on; and there is one n particular that I would warn you against—a rover without principle, —yea, a very destroyer of poor innocent confiding women."

"Who, in the name of Sathanus, can that be?" whispered the dwarf o his companion.

"Nay, that we shall hear presently, if you have but patience," in wered the other in the same low tone. "Keep thy tongue quiet, man, nd I'll warrant we know all in good time."

During this brief colloquy the widow sat folding and unfolding the orner of her apron, and manifesting by various other signs of uneasiess that she should like to know who was meant in this caution, only nat somehow or other she had not courage to put the question to her olossal lover. Hugh, however, saw what was uppermost in her mind, nd willing as he was to release her anxiety on this subject, he thus ommenced:—

"Charming Tabitha, I spoke to you just now in the words of caution, -I told you there was one lover of yours that ought, more than all the st, to be carefully guarded against. That one is—"

Here he whispered in the widow's ear so that not a word—not a llable reached those who were so anxiously listening to hear who is dangerous rival might be. Dame Tabitha Tickletrout at first apared to be rather offended that she should be suspected of having any sort of liking for the party that had been named, but quickly recovering her good humour, she burst into a peal of laughter so loud and hearty, that it was as much as Christopher and Peter could do to refrain from joining in the chorus. Luckily, however, they were able to check their risible inclinations, and when the widow had somewhat recovered herself she thus resumed :—

"Did any mortal living, ever hear such ridiculous nonsense? Why, surely, Hugh, thou art gone mad, or never would'st thou have imagined that I could have thought seriously for a moment of encouraging such a little imp of folly and conceit, as Christopher Dumps."

"But I do think it," answered the giant, "and what's more, if ever I catch him trying to outrival me in thine affections, I'll—I'll——"

Here a low, suppressed groan interrupted the speaker—the screen was violently moved to and fro by the force of little Kit's exertions to release himself from the arms of Peter, and almost at the same moment, the dwarf springing over the barrier, alighted in a large washing tub of water, which the good dame had placed there just before the arrival of Hugh. This incident, of course, served to cool the rage of Christopher for the present, and being picked out, half drowned, from the aukward situation into which he had fallen, he would fain have beat a hasty retreat had not Hugh seized him by the arm and forcibly detained him where he was.

"Why thou half-drowned rat," exclaimed the giant, fiercely, "what, in the devil's name, hath brought thee here at such a moment as this? Speak, sirrah, I command thee, or into the water thou goest again, with little chance of coming out again till thy worthless life has been sacrificed to my just indignation."

"Why look, Master Hugh," answered the dwarf, pertly, "I thought thou wert going to make a fool of thyself in this business with the widow Tickletrout, and having thine own interest at heart, I come hither with thy brother Peter to see whether we could not laugh thee out of this ridiculous affair."

"A ridiculous affair you call it!" exclaimed Hugh indignantly. "And what, I pray, is there so ridiculous in a man surrendering himself to the charms of female beauty?"

"But remember thine age."

"I have done so, and nothing has come of that reflection, save that it is time I now wed, if ever I mean to do so——"

"But thy size renders thee a fitting mate only for a giantess."

"Bah! thy little carcase is choke full of envy because thou art such a pigmy. 'Fore George, Kit, if I was such a diminutive reptile as thou art, I would drown myself in the first puddle I came near. It would be doing the world a service, and I should think all the better of thy magnanimity hereafter."

"Hugh! Hugh! thou art striving to make me angry with thee," cried the dwarf, half drawing forth his rapier. "These taunts are intended to urge me to madness, that thou may'st have a better colour to put me—a rival that thou dreadest—out of the way."

"A rival, callest thou thyself?—Psha!—I have but to put my foot upon thee and the reptile would be crushed!"

"Nay, Hugh," interposed Dame Tabitha, "this is going too far;—Master Christopher Dumps is no churl that he should be mad a subject for thy rude jests, and if thou would'st gain my love it must not be by quarrelling with one who I am proud to call my friend."

"There! hear you that, Master Hugh?" exclaimed Kit, who observed not the merry look of the widow as she glanced towards her gigantic

wooer. "Will not her own words convince you that I am not so despicable in her eyes as you would fain suppose."

"Christopher Dumps is in the right," continued the laughing dame. "He is not to be scorned because he happens to be less in stature than other men; look at his valour and nice sense of honour,—are they not patterns for people of larger growth, and shall I hold him in contempt when I know that in love he is generous and sincere?"

"Well, well, good dame," exclaimed Hugh, who saw that she was only making herself merry at the dwarf's expense, "I grant the little mannikin hath some tolerable qualities, and since he appears to be such a favourite with thee, why there is my hand for him to take, and henceforth let him look on me only as a friend."

"Then friends let us be since it is thine own wish," replied Christopher, seizing the giant's hugh fist in his own tiny grasp. "I quarrel with no man, unless it happens that I am first aggrieved, and as for thee, I would rather be thy friend than thine enemy, if thou wilt only give me a fair chance of winning the hand of Dame Tabitha Tickletrout."

"But, perhaps, Dame Tabitha would rather not be pestered with thy suit," observed the giant.

"Nay, for that matter, I care not about it," answered the widow, smiling graciously upon both her lovers. "At present my mind is not made up which I will have;—there is a vast difference in your stature, it is true; the one being far above the usual height of men, and the other as far below it. Both have sought to obtain my consent, and both hitherto are uncertain who is to obtain my hand."

"Then put an end to all doubt at once by declaring who shall be the happy man," exclaimed Peter.

"Why that is a question that must not be too rashly resolved on," answered the widow. "For my own part I am in no hurry to throw away my liberty, and were I to confess on which side my preference lay, the successful wooer would never cease teazing me till I had named the day for our union."

"Then it seems you take a pleasure in tormenting us," observed Christopher Dumps tartly.

"There you do me injustice," replied the widow. "The truth is, this matter requires some deliberation, and I must request a few hours to consider of it ere I give an answer upon which my future happiness depends."

"Shall we know your determination to morrow?" asked Hugh; "say you will, and I promise to wait patiently till the time has expired, but if you determine to keep me in suspense, why then the matter shall drop where it is, and I will look out for another mistress who is not quite so fond of playing the coquette."

"Agreed!" whispered the widow, "come and sup with me to-morrow evening, and I will give you my decided answer. Your brother can accompany you if you please, and let my resolution be what it may, we will at least pass a pleasant evening in each others company."

Having thus got rid of her two biggest guests she next made precisely the same appointment with Christopher Dumps, who she also sent away though not without again charging him to be punctual in his keeping his appointment, as he regarded her favour. Of course, little Kit was not slow in giving the required promise, and skipping away from the widow's presence he went towards his own lodging resolving not to lose the widow through any want of perseverance on his own part.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE AFFAIRS OF QUEEN JANE BEGIN TO ASSUME A VERY THREATENING APPEARANCE.—INTERVIEW BETWEEN HER MAJESTY AND THE DUKE OF SUFFOLK.—UNEXPECTED RETURN OF LORD GUILDFORD DUDLEY.—A CONFERENCE AND THE AWKWARD DILEMMA WHICH BEFALS SIMON RENARD AND HIS FELLOW CONSPIRATORS.

The disaffection that commenced with the accession of Queen Jane to the throne of England now began to wear a more serious aspect. Each hour served but the more plainly to show the dislike with which people regarded what they were pleased to term her usurpation of the sovereign power;—large bodies of men flocked to the standard which had been raised in behalf of the Princess Mary, and vast numbers of those who had at first taken part with the Lady Jane, deserted from the cause they had favoured, and thus added strength to her rival, whilst at the same time they were alarmingly weakening the side of the unhappy queen.

It was in the midst of this alarming state of danger that Jane, unable any longer to bear with her dreadful state of suspense,—sent to her father, the Duke of Suffolk, desiring his immediate presence to confer with her on business of pressing emergency. When the messenger left her to convey this message the queen rose from her seat and paced uneasily up and down the apartment, picturing in her own mind the miseries that it appeared impossible to avoid, and devising various schemes by which she might prevent those heavy disasters that appeared ready to fall upon and crush all who had been in any way concerned in her affairs. But turn her mind which way she would, nothing but despair met her view, and throwing herself once more upon her seat she gave way to the tears of regret that the contemplation of her own sorrows drew forth.

In this situation she was found by the Duke of Suffolk, who having instantly obeyed his daughter's summons entered the chamber just as she was indulging those griefs that she could no longer endure without repining. As he beheld the fair and trembling girl before him, absorbed in sorrows and yielding to her fears, his heart smote him for the share he had taken in raising her to so perilous an eminence, and advancing to the chair on which she had thrown herself, he laid his hand lightly on her fair arm, and earnestly implored her to cease those unavailing tears, and seek instant means for extricating herself from the dangers that had so suddenly encompassed her.

"Alas!" she cried, in an agony of tears, "how am I to extricate myself from peril, when all upon whom I ever relied have turned against me to support and strengthen my rival?"

"Nay, my daughter, not all," exclaimed the Duke of Suffolk, in a tone of encouragement, "You have yet many powerful and influential friends left, who, though greatly outnumbered by your foes, will never cease to battle in your cause until they have either conquered or fallen in the service of their queen."

"And all this must be at the expense of blood, which I should rather seek to preserve," cried Jane. "That my affairs are now in a most desperate situation, I cannot but be aware; many lives depend upon the decision I may come to, and therefore do I at once yield up my brief held sovereignity to her who has so resolutely demanded it."

"But you forget how many lives will be sacrificed in the event of your yielding thus easily," answered the Duke of Suffolk. "Your cousin Mary is said to be cruel and sanguinary in temper; nay, she has vowed to devote to death all the leaders who have taken part against her, and thus a single precipitate act will, to a certainty, involve your father in peril, if not death itself."

This was a result that Jane had not contemplated—her frame shuddered convulsively as she listened to the latter words of her father, and then throwing herself into his arms, she sobbed out an earnest desire that he would aid her with his counsel and relieve her, if possible, from the frightful difficulties with which she was surrounded.

"Thou see'st," she said, "the progress my enemies are making to dethrone me and exalt in my place her who they justly consider as the lawful monarch of these fair realms. Each hour serves to strengthen her resources against us whilst our own affairs grow more and more desperate. Advise me, then, I implore you, and whatever you may think will be most beneficial to my friends, shall be fearless executed on my part, even though it should lead me next moment to the scaffold."

"My request is, then," answered the Duke of Suffolk, "that you remain firm in this trying moment, lest our foes should observe our weakness and take advantage of it."

"You would have me assume an appearance of security that I do not feel?"

"I would—in that lies our only chance of future success."

"Alas!" cried Jane, "I fear I shall play the part of a hypocrite but indifferently. To your hands, however, I have trusted my fortunes, whether for good or for evil, remains to be proved, and from this moment I leave every thing to your judgment. Advise me as you will, dear father, and I will be as obedient as a child."

"Nay," answered Suffolk, "thou must not be a mere puppet in this case either—let each act appear to be thine own—be thou a sovereign in deeds as well as name, and there is yet a good chance left that thou wilt attain a speedy triumph over thy rebellious foes."

"Methinks that is scarcely to be expected, my honoured lord," replied Jane, pensively; "thou knowest the superior strength that is arrayed against us in this quarrel with my cousin—her army is said to more than double that which has been collected in my behalf, and her followers are devoted heart and soul, to the cause of their mistress, whilst mine are constantly deserting and leaving me each day more and more helpless."

"This yielding to despair will prove our utter destruction," exclaimed the Duke of Suffolk, with more than his usual sternness. "Firmness of heart and a steadfast reliance upon the honour of your friends, can alone maintain you in your present position, and yet, with pain, I see that my daughter is the first to take alarm at the appearance of danger."

"You mistake me greatly, sir," answered the queen, proudly repelling the charge. "For myself, I care not, the headsman's axe will most likely ere long release me from a world which has ceased to possess any charms, and if any fear I have it is excited entirely by the unhappy condition to which my generous supporters have been brought. This, my lord, had made me timid and wavering, for heaven above knows how my heart bleeds for the sufferings that may ere long fall upon those I love for their devotion to my cause."

"Again I warn thee against this fatal weakness," exclaimed the Duke of Suffolk.

"And again I tell thee it is vain to warn me," replied Queen Jane. "I have looked anxiously and deeply into the probable result of this unfortunate business, and the more I reflect upon it, the more reason do I see for regretting the rash step I was induced to take, when, at the solicitation of my friends, I was induced to emerge from my much loved privacy."

"Knowest thou that by these words thou conveyest a reproach against the Duke of Northumberland?" demanded her father, sternly.

"I cast no reproach upon him," replied the queen; "for heaven knows how often I have thought of the fearful danger he has incurred by the decisive steps he has taken against her who now seeks my downfall. He has risked life and fortune on the stake, and I should indeed be ungrateful were I to forget the zeal and loyalty with which he has sought to maintain me in the throne, to which he has mainly assisted to raise me."

"Would that I could say as much for his son," exclaimed the Duke of Suffolk, earnestly.

"Father," interposed Jane, with more than her accustomed firmness, "he of whom you are speaking is my husband—he is my wedded lord, and it would ill become me to hear aught said that would raise a doubt against his honour."

"Nay, hath he not left thee when most his presence was required?" demanded the Duke. "Disappointed in his ambitious aspirings towards the throne, he hath taken himself away in dudgeon, and thou art left to battle by thyself against the dark intrigues of thy deadly enemies!"

"My life on it, thou dost him a most foul wrong," exclaimed the queen, with generous warmth.—"Lord Guildford Dudley is the very soul of honour; and if by chance he was angered by my firm refusal to elevate him to a rank equal to my own, he will soon see that I was ctuated by no selfish motives, and ere long the truant will return to upplicate pardon for his late ill humour."

" By Heavens thou art a true prophetess," cried Lord Dudley, opening the door, and hurrying to the arms of his beautiful and forgiving wife. "Pardon me, dear Jane, for any uneasiness I may have caused, nd henceforward thou shalt find me less violent when thou crossest me in my aspirings after greatness."

"My dear lord," cried the queen affectionately, "thy return amply epays me for any uneasiness thy absence occasioned. There is my hand—my heart I need scarcely say, beats as warmly for thee as ver it did."

"I know it, love," answered her husband, warmly kissing the hand he had extended to him. "I chanced to overhear the latter part of hy conversation with his Grace of Suffolk, and enough reached my ars to convince me that my late absence was both cruel and unjust."

"Then your lordship must have heard at the same time that I spoke not over favourably of you, with reference to your abrupt departure from he Tower," observed Suffolk.

"Of a truth I did hear thee," answered Dudley, with a smile; "and even hadst thou spoken more severely of me than thou didst, I could forgive it all most freely, since it was the means of drawing from Jane the declaration of her continued love for me. There is my hand, your Grace, and, being now reconciled, let us see whether something cannot be done to extricate ourselves from the difficulties which are every moment thickening around us."

"Alas!" sighed the queen, "in striving to relieve ourselves from the peril into which we have fallen, we shall only involve ourselves still more deeply into the dilemma we would avoid. By this time my rival has matured her plans, and if the news we have just received may be relied on, it is her intention to march with her troops to London, where it seems probable she will be received with joy by almost the whole of its inhabitants."

"I have heard that the citizens are preparing for her reception," answered Lord Dudley; "and that a large body of the London apprentices are headed by Richard Calcraft, the youth who, but a few days since, was our prisoner in this fortress, but who found means to escape by swimming across the moat."

"Psha!" exclaimed the Duke of Suffolk, "the rebel you have named is scarcely more than a boy in years."

"Very likely, my lord," replied Dudley; "but young as he is, there is more danger to be apprehended from him than you are aware of. He is a jealous adherent of the Princess Mary:—life seems to be utterly disregarded by him; and, ardent as he is, he will cheerfully throw it away in the service of her who alone he acknowledges as his sovereign."

"Though lowly born he hath a brave and gallant spirit," observed Queen Jane. "I observed the superiority of his demeanour on the day that witnessed my entrance into this ancient fortress; and I could not help wishing that we had a few such to acknowledge our right to the throne. Had that been the case, my lords, we should not now have had to abide the issue of a battle."

"By Heavens, Jane, this despondency will prove the utter ruin of our course," exclaimed Lord Dudley:—"at present, I see nothing that should create despair, since my father has not yet had an opportunity of bringing our enemies to battle. He has vowed to crush the Princess Mary and her partizans; and we all know that when once the Duke of Northumberland has set his heart upon the accomplishment of a design, it is not easy to disappoint him, unless Fortune should take it in her head to frown upon him."

"The Duke's loyalty and valour are not to be doubted," observed Suffolk,—"and yet circumstances may arise to frustrate his intentions. From our last accounts he was leading his army against the insurgents in the eastern parts of the kingdom; there, however, he will be met by a force nearly three times the strength of his own, and should he unhappily be overpowered by numbers, there is nothing to prevent Mary's design of marching direct upon the capital."

"My lords," cried the queen with trepidation, I again implore you to assist me in casting off these useless trappings of royalty, I am already weary of them. The queenly dignity has no charms for me, and by retiring into the privacy from which I have been most unwillingly dragged, it is still possible to prevent the shedding of blood, that must necessarily follow if I still persist in keeping the throne against the wishes of the majority of the people."

"Would, your majesty sacrifice the lives and fortunes of those who have nobly dared to step forward in your behalf?" asked the Duke of Suffolk in a tone of reproach.

"Nay, it is to save them that I would resign my claim to the crown of England," answered Jane. "My rival would be satisfied with so easy a victory over her enemies, and upon mounting the throne of her ancestors, her pardon would be extended towards all those who have so generously exerted themselves in my behalf."

"Your majesty knows not the vindictive nature of Mary, or you would not believe her capable of so much generosity," exclaimed Lord Guildford Dudley. "In religion, she is a bigoted and intolerant Catholic, and her first act of power would be to pour forth the vial of her wrath upon all those who differ with her in the matter of faith. Nay, she has been heard to vow to kindle the fires of Smithfield, and thus sweep away in one dreadful doom, who may dare to entertain opinions different to her own."

"If such is the case I must of necessity maintain my present position even against my own inclinations," answered the queen;—"my own life,—were that considered sufficient,—she should freely have, but when the fate of others depends upon my sacrificing all private considerations, I will cheerfully yield to circumstances, relying upon heaven to protect us from the evil practices of our adversaries."

"Nobly resolved!" exclaimed the Duke of Suffolk, "and now, having decided upon that point, it next remains to arrange matters for our own security. The chief magistrate of London must be drawn to our side, or the captital will fall into the hands of Mary's adherents, and thus an easy victory over us will be secured."

"The Lord Mayor has been invited to attend our next council," answered Queen Jane;—"he has promised to attend, and thus much apprehension has been removed on that head."

"Good!" exclaimed the Duke of Suffolk!—"a vast deal will depend upon the loyalty of the citizens, who I hear are wavering, uncertain which side to take. At present they seem inclined to espouse the cause of Mary, but a little flattery may obtain for us the kind offices of the Lord Mayor, and, in that case, the commonalty will not fail to follow his example. Thus a great advantage will be gained, though I cannot conceal from myself the fact that much remains to be done ere we can hope to gain any head against this claim of Mary's."

"True," observed Lord Guilford Dudley, "and without energy and resolution, our cause will fall to the ground at the first assault of our enemies. There are those among us who are constantly plotting for our destruction, and until they are removed, our cause can never prosper."

"You mean that wily Spaniard, Simon Renard, for one?" exclaime the Duke of Suffolk.

"I do;—he must be looked to."

"His insolence has become insupportable," exclaimed the queen. "Believing as he does that the cause of the Princess Mary is secure, he has dared to mention me of late, and it is scarcely an hour since, in the height of his exultation of some news that had been received from his party, that he dared tell me my reign of usurpation was over."

"Insolent!" muttered Suffolk fiercely.

"And yet why should we regard his threats, since it is in our power to punish him according to his deserts?" asked Lord Guildford Dudley. "The queen has still faithful friends about her, and there are those who would not hesitate to plunge a dagger into his heart upon the slightest signal from her that his removal was necessary."

"Peace, Dudley, I implore you!" cried the queen, startled by the words of her husband. "Blood must not be shed in my behalf until all other means have failed, nor would I sacrifice even the life of that bad man to save my own head from the axe of the executioner."

"Well, there is no need for his blood," answered her husband, "but Simon Renard must be restrained ere it is too late;—there are dungeons in the Tower where better men than himself have languished in confinement, and he must submit to share the same fate until means can be adopted for sending him out of the dominions. How say you, Jane?—Do you consent to order this man's immediate arrest."

"Aye,—if there is no alternative,

"There is no other," returned Dudley.

"Your husband is in the right," observed the Duke of Suffolk;—"the desperation of our present situation demands the exercise of prompt measures, and your enemies must be made to feel that you are not so powerless as they imagine. There are others too, who must be taken care of, among whom I will mention the name of the Earl of Pembroke."

"And Arundel," interposed the Duke of Suffolk.

"And that wily statesman, Sir William Cecil."

"My lords!" cried the queen with evident alarm, "this is a bold step ye have advised, and one that it may turn out is fraught with danger to ourselves. An act like this will be construed into tyranny by those who are glad to take every opportunity of weakening our cause, and it may be that we shall be made to bitterly regret having taken so ill-advised a step."

"This timidity will ruin us," muttered the Duke of Suffolk. "All now depends upon energy and decision;—our enemies must be made to tremble at the wrath they have provoked, and yet you would suffer them to escape, when so good an opportunity offers to lay them powerless at your feet."

"If I hesitated," answered Queen Jane, "it was rather through a feeling of terror, lest it might involve my friends in ruin, than any fear of danger to myself. I will, however, yield in all things to your advice: say that the arrest of these people is absolutely necessary and it shall be done, regardless of any scruples of my own."

"Believe me, it is absolutely necessary," replied Dudley.

"It is enough," replied the queen; "and now it only remains for me to ask when this project is to be carried into effect?"

"This very moment," answered the Duke of Suffolk—"for see, Renard and his traitorous accomplices are even now approaching us. Now, then, it is necessary that your majesty should be firm—think only that the safety of your faithful adherents depends upon the issue, and trust me, the act will serve more than any other to establish you firmly upon the throne."

As he spoke, Simon Renard, followed by the Earls of Pembroke and Arundel, and Sir William Cecil, entered the chamber. The countenance of the former was flushed with an air of triumph, and, approaching the queen, he said:—

"I come, lady, with news that will probably be ungrateful to your ears, but which has gladdened the hearts of all those who are well-wishers of their country. Your cousin, Mary, is advancing with a large army upon London, and, doubtless, ere many hours have elapsed she will be proclaimed in the capital as Queen of England."

"The tidings seem to have elated you, signor," answered Jane, unmoved by this intelligence. "You are the willing bearer of news that you hope is but the forerunner of my downfall; but you shall yet learn, that no danger shall prevent the exercise of that power which you believe to be nearly extinct."

"Your grace judges too harshly of me," exclaimed Renard, endeavouring to conceal his feeling of triumph.

"It is to be hoped I do," replied the queen. "Perhaps you repent the part you have taken against me; and in that case you will not repine at the temporary confinement to which I feel it necessary to order you."

"Your Grace ——— "

"Nay, bandy no words with me," answered Jane, firmly. "I am not yet destitute of friends, as you will find—a few of my soldiers remain faithful, and to their custody I consign you and your friends, until the council shall have determined what is best to do with you."

"Renard was about to leave the apartment at these words, but ere he could do so, the Duke of Suffolk entered with a party of the military, and the treacherous Spaniard, together with his companions, Arundel, Pembroke, and Cecil, were immediately taken by them into custody.

"What means this?" exclaimed Simon Renard, fiercely. "I am no subject of yours, and therefore demand my liberty on the instant."

"You have plotted against me, and have sought my destruction by every means in your power," answered the queen, reproachfully. "During the brief period of my reign, the most dangerous enemy I have had has been Monsieur Simon Renard.—He has dogged me at every turn, has placed spies upon my actions, insulted my friends, and spoken treason to her whom he ought rather to have protected. These are some of the charges I have to bring against you; and, therefore, to secure myself, I have now thought fit to order your arrest, until it can be ascertained whether I shall be able to maintain the exalted station to which I have been raised. A few days, Monsieur Renard, will decide between my cousin and me; and in the mean time I leave you in the care of my faithful friends."

And so saying, Queen Jane, accompanied by her husband and the Duke of Suffolk, quitted the room, leaving Renard and his accomplices to meditate upon the trap into which they had so unexpectedly fallen. Pouring bitter imprecations upon those who had thus gained a temporary advantage over them, the conspirators were led from the apartment and immediately conducted to a place of confinement which had been previously mentioned by the Duke of Suffolk.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HE DILEMMA IN WHICH QUEEN JANE FINDS HERSELF, AND THE DIFFICULTIES THAT PRESENT THEMSELVES ON EVERY HAND.—NEWS ARRIVES OF GILBERT HEMMINGSLEY, AND THE MEANS THAT ARE TAKEN FOR HIS DELIVERANCE.—A VISIT TO THE DUNGEON.—MARTIN FETTERLOCK IN TROUBLE.—HUGH THE GIANT, AND CHRISTOPHER THE DWARF REFER THE ARBITRATION OF THEIR LOVE AFFAIRS TO A GREAT MAN.

THE present was a moment of painful suspense to Queen Jane and er husband; they had, it is true, secured the chief conspirators, who ad been more immediately about her person, but still there were many nemies left in all parts of her dominions, whose power and influence he knew would be exercised in removing her from a throne which hey wished to see occupied by her vindictive rival. Every moment, oo, served to bring fresh intelligence of the machinations of her foes, heir success in various parts of England, and the fast increasing certainty, that unless some favourable circumstance should occur, a very hort time must serve to precipitate her from the seat of sovereignty she ossessed. Not, however, that she regarded this as a prize worth contending for, but she remembered the fate that would certainly be awarded o those who had generously supported her cause against the efforts of er enemies, and, to protect them from the consequences of their noble onduct, she resolved to maintain her present position whilst a chance emained of thwarting those who eagerly sought her destruction.

Lord Guildford Dudley, too, saw with alarm, that he could not conceal, the rapid falling off of friends, upon whom he had most relied upon for support, but of all whose absence he most regretted, was that of Gilbert Hemmingsley, his faithful squire, upon whom he had placed the most reliance, and whose sudden disappearance had given some ground for a suspicion, that he, like many others, had deserted a falling cause, to add his services to the side of the Princess Mary. Anxiously did he inquire of Jane whether she had heard or seen any thing of the young soldier for the last few days, and on the queen replying in the negative, it seemed indeed that his worst fears were but too painfully confirmed. Whilst, however, they were still talking over this disheartening circumstance, a domestic entered to say, that a young female was in the ante-chamber, who had anxiously demanded an audience of Jane, and was now waiting the result of the present application.

The queen hesitated for a moment or two, and then recollecting that no harm could be intended against her, by one so young as the person had been described; she conferred for a moment with her husband, and then desired the stranger to be instantly conducted to her presence. Upon this the servant retired, and immediately afterwards Sybilla entered the room, and threw herself at the feet of her sovereign.

"Nay, maiden, rise, I command thee," exclaimed the queen tenderly;—"this is no time to waste in useless forms, and heaven knows how soon I may be forced to yield up the vain bauble that another's ambition seeks to wrest from me. Thou perhaps have a favour to ask of me;—if so, speak, and though it were my last act of power, it should be exerted in thy behalf."

"Your majesty is all kindness—all condescension," answered the maiden gratefully;—"but it is not for myself that I have ventured to seek this interview;—indeed,—for the truth must be told,—a dear, dear friend of mine has fallen into a trap set by his enemies, and I fear they will destroy him, unless your majesty intercedes in his behalf."

"Ah!" smiled the queen, "thy blushes, maiden, tell me that this *friend*, as thou callest him,—is thy lover. Nay, hide not thy face from me, for I feel deeply interested in thy sorrows, and as far as in me lies, thou shalt find one who will not fail to aid thee in thy search for him."

"But first we must know who the youth is," exclaimed Lord Dudley. "Give us his name, and a description of his person, and perhaps we may yet succeed in restoring him to thy arms. Psha! hesitate not, fair wench, but reveal at once the name of thy lost swain."

"Gilbert Hemmingsley," answered the blushing girl.

"Hah! my squire, by all that's singular," exclaimed Lord Guildford Dudley, starting with surprise. "Speak girl,—what knowest thou of him, or the mysterious absence, which, but a few minutes since I was so deeply deploring?"

"He is in the hands of a villain," replied Sybilla, with earnestness; "one Martin Fetterlock, the gaoler of the fortress, has dared to lay violent hands on him, and he is now lying in one of the Tower dungeons in momentary expectation of falling beneath the murderous steel of his gaoler."

"Girl!" exclaimed Lord Dudley, "art thou sure of what thou sayest?"

"Alas! but too sure," replied Sybilla.

"This is some trick to deprive us of the services of a faithful friend," cried Queen Jane. "Gilbert Hemmingsley was known to be zealous in our cause, and doubtless this Fetterlock acts under the orders of some more powerful agent."

"True; but he shall be released, and that speedily," replied her husband; and then addressing himself to Sybilla, he enquired whether she would be able to lead any one to the place where her lover was confined.

"I could!" she answered, "but Christopher, the Dwarf, has undertaken to fulfill that task himself, and he now waits in the court-yard to accompany any one to the place where Gilbert Hemmingsley is confined."

"His services shall be accepted, and rewarded generously," answered Dord Dudley;—"but now I would know of thee, why thou hast not sooner informed us of the dangerous situation in which thy lover has been placed?"

"Alas!" replied Sybilla, "his enemies took care to prevent his situation being known, and in order to render every thing still more secure, Martin Fetterlock prevailed upon my guardians to lock me up in my own chamber, from which I have only just now succeeded in escaping."

"There villany shall be punished when least expected," replied Lord Guildford Dudley. "This instant I will go to his succour, and should my assistance prove too late, his betrayers shall be made to feel the heavy wrath of one who is resolved to avenge him."

So saying, Dudley quitted the apartment, and Sybilla was about to follow, when the queen, perceiving her intention, commanded her to stay.

"Sybilla," she exclaimed, "I would have you remain with me; I have need of a faithful friend, and in you, I believe I shall find one whose zeal and affections will prove some solace to me in the hours of affliction that are not far off."

"I obey your majesty's commands with pleasure," replied Sybilla, "and yet I would fain persuade you that the misfortunes you anticipate will never occur. Faithful hearts yet remain in your righteous cause, and though your opponents may succeed for a brief time, the period is not far off that shall witness the dispersion of those dark, stormy clouds that at present obscure the horizon."

"Thou art a good wench, and thy words at any other period of my life might have proved a solace in the midst of affliction. But there are many things that thou dost not yet know, and therefore will I unbosom my griefs to thee, hoping that thou wilt aid me with thy counsel and advice. Answer me as a friend, Sybilla—for misfortunes have reduced me to thine own level—advise me as thou seest best, but be careful not to excite hopes that may never be realized."

With these words Queen Jane seated herself, and while Sybilla stood close at hand, she related the means by which she had been elevated to the throne; the troubles that had been consequent upon that ill-advised step, and the misfortunes that were now rapidly thickening and threatening to involve her, and the party who supported her, in one wide and devasting ruin.

Leaving the queen and her attendant for the present, however, we must now follow Lord Guildford Dudley, who, having been guided by little Christopher Dumps, was conducted by him to the lodging of the two giants, who no sooner learnt the high rank of their visitor than they promised to accompany him to the prison of Gilbert Hemmingsley, and break open the door if, in the meantime, the key could not be found. On reaching the door of the cell which had been recently occupied by Gilbert, they were met by the person who had been sent to procure the key, but as that person had not been successful in reaching it, a consultation was held as to whether they should not at once proceed to force an entrance by violent means. But the next question that arose was, how this was to be done, for the door happened to be clamped with immense nails, and from the great care with which this had been done, it was evident that the task they had undertaken, was by no means an easy one. By way, therefore, of obviating this difficulty, another messenger was despatched in search of the under-gaoler, who was supposed to have a key in his possession, but whilst they were giving directions to the man as to the method by which he was to proceed, a voice was heard calling lustily to them from the interior of the dungeon, and on listening to the sounds they ascertained that the voice was that of Master Martin Fetterlock, who, the reader will remember, was left in the cell when Gilbert contrived to effect his escape. At first they could scarcely believe their ears, but Hugh, the elder of the two giants, knew the voice too well to doubt who the prisoner was, and bursting into a tremendous laugh that echoed like thunder through the vaulted roof, he enquired of the captive how in the name of wonder he had got into such an aukward situation.

"Ask me not now, good Hugh," exclaimed the gaoler, placing his mouth to the key-hole so as to render himself the more audible ; "don't trouble yourself just now to know how I got here, but set about the task of delivering me from this purgatory, and a purse, brimfull of golden pieces shall be thy reward."

"Is thy condition so disagreeable then?" inquired Hugh.

"I shall die of suffocation if I remain here much longer," answered the gaoler with a doleful groan.

"Thus," added Hugh, "thou hast found out at last that these dungeons are not exactly the sort of place that a man would choose for his dwelling."

"It is insufferable, my good friend."

"Well, I am glad thou hast found it so," answered the giant ; "'tis well thou should'st know what the poor devils endure that happen to be placed here, and therefore I will let thee remain a few hours longer that thou may'st learn to be more merciful to thy captives in future."

"Nay, Hugh, I prythee hear me," cried the terrified gaoler, "remember the purse of gold pieces I promised thee ; dost thou hear me Hugh? A purse of gold pieces to him that gives me liberty."

"It will not do," replied the giant, "thou must be made to feel the horrors of those poor wretches who have been under thy tender guardianship."

"Hear me, Hugh, if I have not offered enough to satisfy thy avarice, thou shalt have two purses of gold pieces."

"Fool ! I cannot do it if I felt inclined to set thee at liberty," replied the giant. "I have not the key of the dungeon, and the door is so closely studded with nails that all my strength against it would be thrown away."

"If thou wilt earn my reward there is a way to do it," cried the terrified gaoler. "Near thee, in a recess, stands a ponderous iron club ; possess thyself of that, and the door will not be long before it yields to thy giant strength."

"Release him," said Lord Dudley, as Hugh returned with the weapon which had been named by Martin Fetterlock. "Give the poor wretch his liberty, and perhaps his gratitude may prompt him to point out the way by which we may find my faithful squire, Gilbert Hemmingsley."

This was enough for the giant, who raising the ponderous club, wielded it with such skill and enormous strength against the thick ribbed door, that at length the portal shook beneath his repeated blows, and presently afterwards it fell down with a tremendous crash. This done, the captive leaped out and sought to make his escape without being discovered, but in his attempt to do this he knocked down poor little Kit Dumps, whose cries for help soon drew the attention of Hugh towards the fugitive. A few strides served to bring him up to Fetterlock, and seizing him by the ear he dragged him back to the presence of Lord Guildford Dudley.

"Your lordship sees the ingratitude of this whelp," he exclaimed. "You heard him promise me two purses of gold for effecting his deliverance, and yet he would now sneak off without paying me the offered reward."

"Nay, never mind that, Hugh," answered Dudley; "I must needs own he has proved his ingratitude, but I will take upon myself to pay the reward he so meanly seeks to evade."

"Pardon me then, your highness," cried Hugh, still retaining a firm hold of his prisoner; "he made the offer himself, and I will keep him to it. Besides, I have another favour to ask of your lordship, which will be a pleasant sequel to the present I am to receive from Master Fetterlock."

"Name your wish, and it shall be gratified if in my power to promote."

"Your highness must know," answered Hugh, "that in this Tower of London dwells one of the fairest widows the sun ever shone upon. In fact, I have fallen desperately in love with her, but at present she looks coldly upon me, and I would now ask of you the favour of interceding with her in my behalf."

"Perhaps your highness will listen to what I am going to say, before you answer him," interrupted little Christopher Dumps. "I, myself, love the widow, Tabitha Tickletrout, and as she has not yet absolutely refused to make me a happy man, I would merely ask you not to intercede for my rival till she has made up her mind to reject my suit."

"Let it be even as you will," answered Lord Dudley, smiling at the contrast exhibited between the two lovers of the widow. "I will promise not to interfere in this delicate affair, so I charge you, Master Hugh,, to look after your own wooing, and if you really love the dame, see that your little rival does not succeed in gaining her consent to wed him before you have made up your mind to pop the all-important question."

"I'll see her without any loss of time," exclaimed Hugh, "and if she persists in playing the coquette, why Christopher may have her and I shall think myself well off from a bad bargain. But to return to business, your highness has not yet said what is to be done with Master Martin Fetterlock."

"Keep him in custody for the present," answered Dudley; "I am now going to return to the presence of the queen, and in a short time we will decide upon what is to be done with him."

Having spoken thus, Lord Guildford Dudley hastened away leaving the others to follow with their captive as soon as they should think proper.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

QUEEN JANE RECEIVES AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.—THE WARNING VOICE.—SIMON RENARD AND HIS COMPANIONS EFFECT THEIR ESCAPE, AND AGAIN SEEK THE PRESENCE OF THE QUEEN.—A NARRATIVE OF CRIME IN WHICH MABEL CALCROFT HAS PLAYED A CONSPICUOUS PART.—SIMON RENARD'S INSULT TO THE QUEEN, AND THE FORTUNATE INTERVENTION OF GILBERT HEMMINGSLEY.—THE ARREST.

Whilst the events were passing which we have described in the latter part of the last chapter, Queen Jane was occupied with the fair

Sybilla, but having at last dismissed her to another apartment on some errand or other, the royal victim threw herself back in her seat, and burying her face in her hands, she gave way to those tears of regret that it was in vain any longer to suppress. Whilst she was thus absorbed in her own mournful reflections, however, the door was again opened, and one of her maids of honour approached, and placed in her hands the broach which she had given to Mabel Calcroft, when the latter threw herself before her on the day she came in procession to the Tower. The queen was startled as she beheld the jewel, and then recollecting that its present owner might desire to have an interview with her, she enquired of the bearer whether the old woman was in attendance. An answer in the affirmative was given, upon which Jane desired the person to be introduced to her presence without delay, and almost immediately afterwards, Mabel entered the chamber in which sat her sorrowing and weeping sovereign.

"Approach me, Mabel Calcroft," exclaimed the queen, as soon as she perceived the presence of the aged woman. "We have met before, and your words conveyed a fearful augury of the sorrow and troubles that would follow my acceptance of the queenly dignity. But few days have passed since that meeting, and yet already have I found that your words were those of truth."

"You have found much grief," answered Mabel, "but more,—much more remains behind. I am here to implore you to lay down the royal diadem, and thus save yourself from a doom that I shudder to think of."

"Oh, you know not how willingly I would do so were it but practicable," sighed the queen.

"All is practicable were your heart but once set on it," replied Mabel. "I implore you to heed my words ere it is too late;—treachery is at work on every side;—your foes are on the alert, and perhaps a few hours more may place you entirely in their hands."

"And if it should be so, I can die content," answered Jane. "I know that nothing less than my life will satisfy the implacable fury of my vindictive foes; and could I but be assured that yielding myself up as their victim, would save my followers from their vengeance, I would this moment surrender my crown into the hands of my cousin Mary, and the next walk to the scaffold and atone for the faults I have been induced by others to fall into."

"Nay, it is not necessary that one so young, so lovely, and so innocent, should meet a death of violence," cried Mabel earnestly. "There are secret passages leading from this fortress, known only by myself and two or three others. By one of those you may effect your escape, and, believe me, lady, there is no act that would afford me half the satisfaction that would be mine, could I but once see you safe from the reach of those who seek your destruction."

"This is too precipitate," exclaimed the queen; "I must consider your proposition;—another time I will give an answer, whether I can thus follow the advice you given."

"Delay will but bring ruin in its train," answered Mabel Calcroft;—"even a few hours may suffice to render your escape from this place impossible."

"It is impossible already," exclaimed a hoarse voice near them, and looking round they discovered Simon Renard, accompanied by the Earl of Arundel and Sir William Cecil, who at that moment were entering the apartment.

"I am lost!—for ever lost!" cried the queen, shuddering and turning from those who had thus broken upon her privacy.

"Aye, you are indeed lost, unless you choose to follow the advice of one who seeks not your blood," answered the ambassador. "Resign your pretentions to the throne of England;—sign this written abdication, and I will myself assist in your escape from the Tower."

"Trust myself to thee, Renard!—never!" exclaimed the queen, shrinking with terror from his presence.

"Then let the consequences rest upon your own head," answered the treacherous Spaniard. "I would have saved you, but your obstinacy has proved your own ruin. From this moment you are no longer queen; —the sovereign power has been claimed by Mary and accorded to her by the people; she is now on her march to London, and a few hours will see her mistress even of this fortress."

"Yield, I intreat you," exclaimed Mabel who saw that the unfortunate Jane was rendered speechless by the abruptness with which this declaration was made.

"Mabel Calcroft!" muttered Simon Renard, "why do I behold you here?—Are you so wedded to the cause of the usurper, that you must needs come to console her upon the termination of her brief sway?"

"I am here to prevail upon her to lay down a dignity that has brought with it nothing but sorrow and pain," replied the old woman. "I have sought to persuade her to yield the sceptre to her rival, and should have succeeded, had it not been for your unexpected arrival."

"Humph! thou art insolent!" exclaimed the Spaniard; "yet I dare say thou hast not told her that thy presence in the Tower was procured by those who seek her life. Thou wert to poison the Lady Jane Dudley even as thou didst shorten the days of the late king, Edward the Sixth."

"What horrors are these I hear?" cried Jane, starting as from a dreadful dream.

"I have spoken nothing but the truth," answered Simon Renard. "The days of his late majesty were shortened by means of poison administered by the hands of his nurse, Dame Mabel Calcroft. The murderous deed was proposed by your grace's father-in-law, the haughty Duke of Northumberland, and it was but now intended to despatch you by the same cowardly means."

"Oh!" cried the agonized Jane, "this,—this is too horrible to be true."

"There is not a word of falsehood in what I have said," resumed Simon Renard;—"The Duke poisoned the king that he might raise you to the throne before the rightful heiress had time to collect her forces to prevent the usurpation. So far his projects have been attended with success, and now that he has made clear the road to kingly eminence for himself, he has plotted to despatch you by the same vile means, in order that the last obstacle in his way might be removed. For this purpose Mabel Calcroft was introduced to this place, and ere many hours you would have been numbered among the numerous other victims of the intriguing Duke."

"I—I cannot believe it!" cried Jane, struggling violently with her excited feelings.

"Alas, lady, it is but too true," answered Mabel. "I knew well the peril in which you were placed, and would have warned you to avoid the snares of your enemies. For that purpose I threw myself in your way during your progress a few days since. I warned you of your present danger, but you turned a deaf ear to me, and I saw with pain, that she I would have saved, must fall amid the ruin that had been prepared by her enemies."

"You hear, madam," exclaimed Renard; "my words are confirmed by this woman."

"Simon Renard, I know thee for a villain!" exclaimed Jane, collecting all her courage on this trying occasion. "You have ever been at the head of those who sought to do me wrong, and the last act of my queenly power shall be to hurl upon thee that punishment which thy crimes so justly merit. My Lord of Arundel," she continued, addressing herself to that nobleman, "you have seen your queen insulted by this bad man, and I now command you to arrest him on a charge of treason."

"Pardon me," replied Arundel, with hypocritical humility, "but you no longer possess sovereign power, and I must hesitate ere I lay hands on one who I know to be a friend of her I acknowledge as my queen."

"Traitor!" cried the Lady Jane, trembling with wrath. "Thou hast refused to obey me, but surely I am not so destitute of friends, but some one will be found to arrest those who oppose themselves against me."

"Aye, there is one who will live and die in thy service," exclaimed a voice from the ante-chamber, and the next moment Gilbert Hemmingsley rushed in, sword in hand, and seizing the Spaniard by the throat, he bade him yield or perish on the instant. Hereupon a desperate struggle ensued between them, and it was becoming more and more evident that Gilbert Hemmingsley must be overpowered by the superior strength of his antagonist, when just at the critical moment, Lord Dudley and a strong party of faithful guards rushed to the squire's assistance. In a few moments Gilbert was released, and the Spaniard, together with his traitorous associates, were seized and in the power of their captors.

"'Tis well!" exclaimed Renard, with contempt: "this is the second time we have been in custody, my Lord Dudley; but be assured you possess not the means to hold us so for many hours. We have escaped once from our dungeon, and a brief time will see us again at liberty. Farewell, my lord, and prepare yourself for that doom which, perhaps, ere another week has passed, may be yours."

As the hapless queen witnessed the departure of her foes, she reflected deeply on the parting words of Simon Renard, and throwing herself upon the bosom of Lord Guildford Dudley, she gave way to those tears of agony that could alone relieve her troubled brain.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A CONSULTATION BETWEEN QUEEN JANE AND HER FRIENDS.—LORD GUILDFORD DUDLEY'S AMBITION SEEMS LIKELY TO BE THWARTED.—A QUARREL VERY NEARLY LEADS TO FATAL RESULTS.—OF WHAT TOOK PLACE AMONG THE COUNCIL.—THE QUEEN'S RESOLUTION.—HER ABDICATION AND SUBSEQUENT IMPRISONMENT IN THE TOWER.

THE next morning was an eventful one to Queen Jane: she saw that the end of her brief career of royalty had arrived, and preparing herself for the worst, she anxiously consulted with Lord Guildford Dudley upon the prudence of resigning the crown at once, so as to end the struggle that had ensued between her and her rival. But Dudley's whole ambition had been fixed on maintaining the sovereign rule, and, half angry at the suggestion she had thrown out, he returned as an answer, that come what might, he would never consent to her abdica-

tion while a chance remained to hold the dominion of which she was possessed.

In the midst of this conversation the retinue of the Duke of Suffolk appeared at the door of their chamber, and almost at the same instant their noble master advanced with rapid strides through the opening they had formed for him. At a signal they all retired, and being thus left alone with his daughter and her husband, he said in a hurried voice :—

"I have come, Jane, to give the last advice it may ever be in my power to offer. Our enemies are rapidly gaining advantages over us ; the current of misfortune sets strong against her who I have hitherto supported, and it now becomes my duty to warn you against dangers, that, if suffered to increase, must soon overwhelm you in misery and ruin."

"I know, and have forseen all you would warn me against," sighed the lovely queen. Even from the first I knew but too well the results of this mad enterprise, and now the storm of adversity is about to burst over me with fearful violence."

"This weakness will destroy us," exclaimed Lord Dudley reproachfully ; "at the present moment you should be firm, and yet the timidity of one man threatens to involve you in the wreck he pretends it is his desire to avert."

"If your lordship's words are directed against me," cried Suffolk, "I cast them back with the scorn they so justly merit. I have been faithful to the cause whilst a chance of success remained ;—nay, I have risked all in the behalf of my daughter, but when I see that the last shadow of hoep has disappeared, it becomes my duty to rescue a beloved child from the fearful precipice over which she is about to fall."

"My Lord of Suffolk," answered Dudley with scorn, "you may cal this act of yours one of prudence, but I can characterize it as nothing less than cowardice."

"How!—this from a beardless boy!" exclaimed the Duke of Suffolk, grasping the handle of his sword. "By heaven, had not a helpless woman been present, thou should'st have learnt ere now, that he you have maligned is no coward."

"Father!—Dudley!—for mercy's sake forbear these useless quarrels!" cried Jane throwing herself between them, and appealing to each by turns. "I had hoped that misfortune would have made ye faster friends, and yet now, when I have most need of your services, ye would increase my difficulties by these mad outbreaks of temper."

"Let him beware then how he provokes me by advice such as he has just given," answered Dudley. "Misfortunes have rendered me desperate, and if he again offers advice such as he has once given, it may chance that rage will so far overmaster reason, that his blood will be made to answer for it."

"Boy!—those threats are offered in vain," retorted Suffolk, proudly. "I have already ventured my life in the behalf of my daughter, and am ready to do so again, could any good result from my exertions. As it is, however, I see nothing to hope for from further resistance; the cause we have striven for is utterly lost, and nothing now remains but for the Lady Jane to abdicate the throne, and thus procure for herself and her friends the pardon of those who must now come into immediate power."

"That she shall never do with my consent," answered Dudley. "We have played for a great stake, and having obtained possession of the sceptre, she shall continue to hold it, until her enemies have it in their power to wrest the emblem of sovereignty from her grasp. This, my lord, is my firm determination, and you can therefore abandon the cause of your child as soon as you may think it prudent to do so."

"Hear me, Dudley!" exclaimed the queen firmly. "I have a right to a voice in this matter, and my resolution is to yield up all pretentions to the throne, ere more blood is shed in a cause that has now become utterly hopeless. Ambition is not among my foibles, and therefore can I more readily resume my former rank without casting back a glance of regret at the pomp I never covetted."

"Then you will abandon all in despite of my wish to the contrary?" cried her husband.

"In this one respect I fear I must prove disobedient," answered the queen. "I have hitherto been a passive instrument in the hands of aspiring men; I now suffer for my folly, and it is therefore time that I should retrieve my error ere it be too late. The fate of many kind and zealous friends depends upon my firmness in this matter, and I am therefore compelled to displease even my husband rather than sacrifice those who have generously risked so much in my unhappy cause."

"You have spoken wisely, my daughter," exclaimed the Duke of Suffolk; "this is, indeed, no time to regard mere individuals when so much is at stake. But I came hither on other business;—the council has assembled in the chamber, and, with my Lord Guildford Dudley's permission, I now conduct you to their presence."

"My noble lord," cried Gilbert Hemmingsley, who at that moment rushed into the apartment, "I come the bearer of bad news. Simon Renard and the others who were last night committed by you to prison, have found means to escape from their dungeon, and are now waiting your presence in the council chamber."

"Hah!" exclaimed Dudley; "escaped say you?—By what fiends aid have they contrived to cheat the scaffold of victims, whom I intended to have sent thither?—Speak, Gilbert, who has assisted in this traitorous work?"

"They have effected it without assistance," answered the Squire. "Simon Renard seems to know all the secret passages connected with the dungeons of this fortress, and it is through him that the mischief has been done."

"That man has haunted me like an evil genius," cried the queen. "To him I owe the many enemies that have lately risen up against me, and I fear that he it is who will finally hasten on the dark and gloomy fate I so much dread to think of."

"This weakness must be conquered Jane," exclaimed her husband. "The present moment requires the exercise of all your energies;—rise above the pressure of temporary misfortunes, and I can answer for it things will not wear so melancholy an aspect as you seem to imagine. However, it is now time that we should go to meet these rebellious councillors;—show yourself among them as their queen;—act firmly, vigorously, resolutely, and you will yet find that the cause you were about to abandon is not entirely lost."

Jane sighed as she took the arm of her husband, and leaning languidly upon him, she proceeded unwilling to the presence of those whose frown she dreaded to encounter. As she entered the Council Chamber no one rose to greet her with that reverence which, from her station, she had a right to expect. On the contrary, half suppressed murmurs were heard as she passed along to the upper end of the hall, and on ascending the throne, she could perceive around her nothing but the stern glances of those who had met there to compel her immediate abdication. Agitated by a thousand conflicting thoughts, she trembled violently on first taking her seat, but quickly conquering this timidity, she shortly rose up, and glancing round upon the assembly, said with some show of firmness:—

"My lords and gentlemen, I, a poor weak woman, have come to ask your counsel and advice under the peculiar difficulties that at present surround me. You have all heard that my cousin Mary has collected together a large force to drive me from the throne which I have ascended, not so much through any ambition of my own as for the advantage of the nation. To preserve the Protestant Religion from the attacks of its enemies was the motive that induced me to yield to the solicitation of certain friends, and if it please heaven to ordain that it shall be so, I will cheerfully lay down my life in the service of my country."

"Hear me, lady," exclaimed Simon Renard, who now thrust himself forward to a prominent place; "the will of the people is against you—they know that the rights of the Princess Mary have been foully violated, and nothing will ever satisfy them but your instant and unconditional abdication."

"Am I to understand that Monsieur Simon Renard speaks the sentiments of all I see around me?" demanded Jane.

"He does," replied a dozen voices.

"In that case I will no longer burden myself with a bauble that possesses no charms for me," cried Jane, handing her sceptre to the Duke of Suffolk, who forthwith proceeded to lay it upon the table round which the council was seated. "You see, my lords," she continued, "I am not ambitious—the loss of yonder ensign of regality cost me not a single regret; unsought for, it came into my hands, and with equal indifference do I yield it up to those who have demanded its restoration."

"'Tis well," exclaimed Renard, triumphantly; "you have surrendered your sovereignity, and now let it be my first task to proclaim Mary, Queen of those dominions, which belong to her by birth and heirship. My lords, join with me, I beseech you, for he who raises not his voice in favour of his lawful sovereign must be regarded in no other light than as a traitor to his country."

As he concluded, the assemblage joined, as with one voice in the cry, and when all had shouted "Long live Queen Mary," their voices mingled in a loud huzza, that showed the zeal with which they had entered into the cause of their new sovereign. As for Lord Guildford Dudley, he regarded the meeting with a look of bitter hatred, and as soon as quiet was somewhat restored, he said:—

"My lords, for this disloyalty to your rightful queen I was somewhat prepared. I knew that there was a fiend of mischief among ye who would never rest satisfied till he had served the master who has sent him hither for no other purpose than to restore the bigotry and intollerance of the Roman Catholic Religion. He has found fools to aid him in a project that will ere long prove their own utter ruin, and bitterly will they yet repent the rashness that has led to this wild step."

"Your lordship may spare yourself the trouble of throwing away idle words," answered Simon Renard, whose exultation had now excited him to the highest pitch; "the queen has abdicated, and therefore whatever you say may only serve to bring upon you the wrath of her who now reigns in the hearts of her people."

"Come, my dear lord," said the Lady Jane to her husband; "all which brought me hither has been accomplished; the throne is no longer mine, and we will now retire into that privacy from which I regret that we were ever drawn."

"Nay, your ladyship must be content to remain a prisoner in our hands till the determination of Queen Mary is known," exclaimed the vindictive Spaniard.

"A prisoner!" cried Jane, with surprise.

"And by whose orders?" demanded her husband.

"By the orders of one who, at the same time, commands you to be taken charge of till it is known whether or not you are to be tried for high treason," answered Simon Renard with the usual bitterness that characterized him. "Aye, proud lord, you may well look amazed, but our gracious queen has entrusted these matters to my care, and he who you lately sent to captivity and a cheerless cell has now the opportunity to retaliate in a manner you little expected."

"Villain! thy life shall pay for these insults," exclaimed Lord Dudley, and drawing his sword, he rushed furiously towards the Spaniard with the intention of sacrificing him upon the spot. In this design, however, he was frustrated by the vigilance of the guards, who, throwing themselves between him and the object of his inveterate hatred, succeeded in grappling with and disarming him ere he had an opportunity of inflicting the deadly mischief he had meditated. Whilst this was passing, Renard stood gazing upon him with a look of triumph, and when his victim stood helpless before him he turned towards the guards and ordered them to convey their prisoners to seperate cells. It was in vain that the almost heart broken Jane implored that they might not be parted in captivity; the villain triumphed in the misery he had it in his power to inflict, and stamping furiously he commanded the hesitating soldiers to bear them to their dungeons without further delay. Against this command it was in vain to contend any longer, and in spite of the tears and entreaties of the unhappy wife, she was dragged out at one door, whilst Lord Guildford Dudley was borne—though not without violent struggle—by another. This done, the Spaniard again seated imself at the council table, where arrangements were made for the im-ediate reception of Queen Mary into the Tower.

CHAPTER XXX.

HE LADY JANE IS VISITED IN HER CAPTIVITY.—ESCAPE PROPOSED.—PREPARATIONS FOR THE DEPARTURE.—THE DIFFICULTIES OUR FUGITIVES HAVE TO ENCOUNTER.—ARRIVAL AT A PLACE OF SAFETY.—THE LADY JANE'S RESOLUTION, AND THE MEANS MABEL CALCROFT HAS TO USE TO URGE HER ESCAPE.

THE remainder of the day passed heavily enough to the Lady Jane, ho, in the solitude of her dungeon had time and opportunity enough o reflect on all that had passed as well as upon that which must quickly llow. That no mercy was to be expected from the vindictive Mary, he too well knew; not, however, that she wished her own life to be pared, but she remembered that her husband was also a prisoner in the ands of their merciless enemies, and fearing lest he might be sacrificed the infuriate hate of Simon Renard, she burst into a flood of tears, in hich situation she was found by Gilbert Hemmingsley and Sybilla, ho shortly afterwards entered her chamber by permission of the Lords f the Council. Finding her in this melancholy condition, they sought by very means they could devise to rouse her from it, but Jane was too eart-stricken to heed their kindly attentions, and it was not until nother voice struck upon her ear that she roused herself from her ttitude of grief to look round and see who it was that had come to visit er in the midst of these afflictions. As she gazed round the cheerless ell that had been allotted to her use, she perceived the aged and hag-ke form of Mabel Calcroft, and then starting from her seat as if some errible thought had rushed upon her brain, she eagerly inquired what vil tidings she was now the bearer of.

"I bear no tidings, my lady, either of good or harm," answered abel, approaching deferentially. "As a mother, I felt for the mis-rtunes of one so young and hapless; my heart bleeds for your ufferings, and I am come to offer you the means of instant escape from is dark and lonesome cell."

"I have no wish to leave it," returned Lady Jane, mournfully;—here I have been sent by my cruel persecutors, and here I will remain, least, till it is ascertained what is to become of my dear husband."

"Pardon me, lady," cried the old woman, "but should you continue that determination all would be lost. By escaping yourself, Lord udley's release may be afterwards effected, and once free from this ace, you may both reach some foreign country where your lives may passed without futher danger."

Still, however, Jane hesitated, and it was not till Sybilla and Gilbert dded their entreaties that she at last seemed to yield to the arguments her advisers. Then fixing a keen and penetrating look upon the old oman, she said with some hesitation :—

"I know not that you are indeed the friend you would have me believe my enemies will lay all sorts of snares to bring me more immediately to their power, and you may be the instrument they have chosen for at purpose."

"Nay," cried Mabel, "there is not a soul that knows of this visit.

A report reached my ears that you had been committed to a dungeon by the lords of the council; and being but too well aware of the evil deeds they meditate, I came hither instantly to offer myself as a guide, having both the power and inclination to release you from the hands of your enemies."

"And how, I pr'ythee, is this to be affected?" asked Jane.

"Easily enough, if you will trust to me," answered the old woman. "To me, all the secret doors of this place are known; I am aware of the subterranean passages to which they lead, and of the means that thus offer themselves to reach a postern on the other side of the moat. These are secrets known to but few besides myself, and I am willing to devote that knowledge to restoring you once more to liberty."

Prevailed upon by the persuasions of Gilbert and Sybilla, the Lady Jane at length reluctantly consented, and then following the old woman through a long series of passages, they came to a spacious vaulted chamber, in one of the walls of which, a door was opened by means of a secret spring, displaying a deep flight of steps, down which it was necessary to proceed in order to reach the place from whence they were once more to emerge into the open air.

For an instant or two Jane hesitated to trust herself down this dreary place, but being once more entreated by her faithful domestics, she yielded to their solicitations, and guided by the hand of Gilbert Hemmingsley, she cautiously commenced the perilous descent. At last, they safely reached the bottom, where another door met their view, which being opened by Mabel Calcroft, exhibited a frightful and narrow passage, from the roof of which water was continually dropping, rendering the place filthy and damp in the extreme, and so slippery as hardly to be passable, even by a more hardy adventurer than the delicate female who was now seeking to escape from the hands of her enemies. This passage, she was informed, led from the precincts of the Tower, passing under the moat, and terminating at the postern, before mentioned, on the outside of the fortress. Once more Jane hesitated from timidity, but urged by her attendants and the imminent peril that awaited her return to captivity, she at last followed the footsteps of Gilbert, who preceded her with a torch, and after a time she found herself in a place where the water ceased to fall from the roof, and which consequently proved that they had passed completely beneath the bed of the moat. Here the lovely fugitive waited till she was rejoined by Mabel Calcroft, who was the last to emerge from the passage, and who now took upon herself the office of guide, leading them up a steep and broken flight of steps, that at length brought them into a small chamber, having no windows, unless a few loop holes could be called such, and only one low, massive door, the strength of which seemed intended to defy any attempts that might be made to force it open. Mabel, however, was fortunately supplied with the key, which, with the aid of Gilbert's strength, was made to open the ponderous portal, and immediately afterwards the whole party, emerging from it, discovered that they had thus succeeded in reaching Tower Hill.

The Lady Jane would have poured forth her thanks to Mabel, for the assistance she had thus rendered, but the old woman interrupted her, saying that her escape was not yet quite certain, as she had to reach the banks of the Thames, where a boat was lying in readiness to convey her back to Sion House, the noble residence of her father-in-law, the Duke of Northumberland.

"But the Lord Guildford Dudley," cried the fair fugitive,—"he must not be suffered to pine in captivity, whilst I seek my own safety in flight.

"Nay," exclaimed Mabel, "there is no remedy for it. He you speak f is more closely watched than you were, and I fear it will be utterly mpossible to release him from the part of the Tower in which he is conined."

"Then I will at least share his dangers," cried Jane resolutely. "If e is to remain a prisoner in the hands of Queen Mary, I also will once more become her captive, by returning to the place from whence you have brought me."

"My dearest lady, that must never be," interposed Gilbert. "Your life would be the forfeit of such an act, and I would rather perish by the most tormenting death, than suffer you again to fall into the hands of those who seek only to allay their fury in your blood."

"Indeed, my lady," cried Sybilla, "you must consent to seek a temporary refuge in Sion House. Gilbert has spoken but too truly when he described the implacable hatred of your foes. They seek a fair pretext to take your life, and were you taken again after this attempt to escape, they would not hesitate to order your immediate death."

"Death hath no terrors for me, girl," sighed the Lady Jane. "The last few days of my existence have filled my heart with disgust, and I am ready, even now, to bow down my head to the block, should my cousin Mary think that by such an act she would secure the peace of her dominions."

"Your ladyship forgets that by so doing you would in all probability involve your husband in the same fate," observed Mabel Calcroft. "If they punish you for accepting the crown, they will not fail to pour forth the vials of their wrath upon those who tempted you to assume the reigns of government. Thus you see the effect of yielding yourself up to those from whom you have escaped, and therefore do I again urge you to resume your flight, ere your absence is discovered by those who will presently visit your vacant dungeon."

"Oh, listen to Mabel, I entreat, dear madam," cried Sybilla earnestly. "She speaks truly, when she describes the dangers of delay, and I can add my own testimony to the peril of which she has spoken that will assuredly fall upon Lord Guildford Dudley, should the queen or her council be cruel enough to order your execution."

"And let me also entreat you," exclaimed Gilbert Hemmingsley, throwing himself at the feet of the Lady Jane;—"let me implore you to escape whilst there is yet a probability of doing so without interruption. The delay of a few moments may prove fatal, and then I feel but too certain of the terrible doom that awaits both you and my honoured lord."

"It is to save him, that I hesitate," answered Jane tenderly. "He is surrounded by enemies powerful and unrelenting in their hate. Some of them have long sought to bring him to destruction, and I fear that this is the time they will choose for carrying their base designs into execution."

"Perhaps," observed Gilbert, "their anger will be lulled when they find that you make no further claim to the throne of England. Then, at least, they will have no excuse for persisting in their persecutions; he will doubtless be restored to liberty, and the future may be passed in that happy privacy which I know your ladyship loves so well."

"Nay, Gilbert," sighed the Lady Jane Dudley, "it is in vain that you would cheer me with these fallacious hopes. I know my husband's foes too well to trust them in a case like this;—vengeance is their cry, and never will they be satisfied till they have fully attained their object."

"What is it you would have then?" asked Mabel.

"My husband's liberty," answered the Lady Jane. "You have succeeded in bringing me beyond those frowning walls, and it is in your power to release him in the same way. Do that and your reward shall be commensurate with the great service you will have performed."

"On that condition, then," cried Mabel, "your ladyship will instantly depart for Sion House."

"I will"

"Then it shall be done," exclaimed Mabel;—ere to-morrow's sun rises Lord Guildford Dudley shall be with you."

Upon this assurance the Lady Jane followed her conductor to the water-side, where they found a boat waiting for them, and in a few moments she and her two faithful attendants were proceeding up the river towards the magnificent home of the haughty Northumberland.

Nor was Mabel Calcroft unmindful of her promise, for shortly after mid-night, Lord Guildford Dudley arrived at Sion House, where he was received with grateful affection, by his lovely, but almost heart-broken wife.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN WHICH IT APPEARS THAT LORD GUILDFORD DUDLEY HAS NOT YET ABANDONED ALL HIS AMBITIOUS HOPES.—A STARTLING PROOF IS PRODUCED OF NORTHUMBERLAND'S BASENESS.—ALARMING INTELLIGENCE.—A PARTY OF QUEEN MARY'S SOLDIERS ARRIVE AT SION HOUSE.—THE LADY JANE AND LORD DUDLEY ARE AGAIN CAPTURED, AND CONVEYED BACK AS PRISONERS TO THE TOWER.

AND now it was that the Lady Jane began to feel the dangers that were pressing upon her on every side. Her present escape she felt assured was but temporary; that her enemies would be more active than ever, she knew but too well, for she was aware of those whose enmity she had most reason to dread, and from Mary herself, no mercy was to be expected, when once she had her unfortunate rival in her power.

Lord Guildford Dudley saw her distress, and strove by every means he could think of to direct her thoughts towards a more cheerful channel.

"This is no time," he said, "to give way to useless lamentations, for a fall that we may not be doomed to experience. I have learnt to look with indifference upon the temporary frowns of fortune, and trust me, dearest Jane, there is nothing in our present condition that we need regard with dread."

"Nothing!" exclaimed Jane with surprise;—"are we not fugitives, and may not a very brief time serve to throw us again into that fearful place from whence we have escaped with so much danger and difficulty?"

"Nay," cried her more ardent husband, "your fears give rise to imaginary terrors which are not likely to exist. We have yet many friends left, and when they have heard of our escape, they will not fail to march directly upon London to our assistance.'

"Yet, methinks their arrival will be too late to do us any service," answered Jane, mournfully. "A few days ago they might have turned the tide of fortune in my favour, but now, when the throne is abdicated in favour of my cousin, their interference will only serve to bring ruin and death upon those who would risk their lives in my behalf."

"The throne is not yet lost," replied Dudley;—"a struggle, and that a vigorous one, will yet take place for it, and, if need be, I will perish rather than yield up a right that I am resolved to defend to the last extremity."

"Alas! and wherefore should my lord persist in so dangerous a resolution, when I am myself willing to abandon the false glitter of royalty?" asked the Lady Jane with intense earnestness. "Shall we not be far happier in that privacy where alone true joy is to be found, and to which my own inclinations have ever drawn me?"

"Your timidity will ruin all my best hopes," exclaimed Dudley as he impatiently strode up and down the room. "In the present emergency we have need of promptness and resolution; we should be stirring us an example to our friends, and yet in this moment of importance you give way to tears when firmness can alone save us."

"Nothing can save us," sighed the unfortunate lady; "my acceptance of the throne has raised powerful enemies against us, and soon, I fear, we are doomed to learn the bitter fate that will be awarded to those who have dared to thwart the ambition of my cousin Mary."

"You would abandon all hopes then?"

"All;—even to become the occupant of a humble cot, so that peace and happiness were to be found beneath its roof."

"This is madness, Jane," cried Dudley, impatiently. "A cottage may have its charms for those who were born to no higher destiny; but you have been called upon by the voice of a mighty nation to rule and govern it, and you cannot now abandon your friends without dishonour."

"It is to save my friends from the miseries I can but too easily foresee," answered Jane, mildly:—"to reserve them from the consequences like to follow is my first duty, and I will do it, even though the act should cost me my life."

"Then my father is to be left to his fate?" exclaimed Lord Dudley, with a burst of anger.

"Nay," replied Jane, "his Grace of Northumberland will have nothing to fear from any step that I may think to proper take. By yielding up the throne I hope to soften the fierce malignity of Mary's temper, and if I obtain no favour for myself, I at least expect to gain a free pardon for all those who have taken up arms in my cause."

"You speak like one who knows not the fierceness of her in whose favour you would forsake a throne."

"I speak only as I hope to find he," answered Jane." That my cousin is cruel and revengeful in disposition I well know, but the heart must indeed be callous to all the better feelings of humanity that could prompt its possessor to deeds of vengeance when her enemies have fallen even to the very dust. No, my dear lord, I will not think so harshly of my successor, who, perhaps, may prove more lenient than your fears may deem possible."

"To many she will doubtless extend her mercy," replied Lord Dudley.

"It may be policy so to do at the commencement of her reign, but do not, I implore you, flatter yourself with the hope that she will suffer you, her late rival, to escape with impunity."

"So that I am the only sufferer, I could die content."

"You would not be the only sufferer;—I also am one whom she will never forgive, and the moment that sees her the occupant of your throne, will witness my incarceration within a prison's dreary walls. This will be the end of your mad determination, and I now ask for the last time whether yours shall be the act that sends a husband to the scaffold."

But the heart of the Lady Jane was too full for utterance; an hysterical sob burst from her lips, and sinking back in her seat, she gave way to the tears that were brought forth by the words of her ambitious husband. Dudley saw that she was deeply affected, and hoping to bring her to his purpose, he continued:—

"I have already pointed out to you, my dear Jane, some of the consequences that must follow the surrender of your queenly dignity into the hands of the presumptuous Mary. I have not, however, told you all, for there is one who will surely perish by her orders—and that one, having served you faithfully and loyally—should be saved at all hazards."

"Who is it you allude to?" demanded Jane, roused by these words of her husband.

"My father."

"Ah, my lord," sighed Jane, "his Grace of Northumberland has been guided more by his own ambition than any desire to place me upon the throne. You start, Dudley, and seem to doubt my words, but unfortunately I have too much reason to know that he meant to have grasped the crown for himself as soon as he could have found the means of deposing me with safety."

"Nay, thou dost most cruelly malign him."

"Listen, and you shall hear more," interrupted the Lady Jane. "I have evidence that the late King was hurried prematurely to the grave; death, it is true, was ready to snatch his prey, but poison shortened the existence of young Edward—and thus was an opportunity offered to place me upon the throne before."

"And by whose orders dost thou suppose the poison was administered?" demanded Lord Dudley.

"By those of your father!"

"Jane!" exclaimed her husband, angrily, "this is some tale invented by the malice of an enemy, to which thou hast so credulously given ear. My father was ever a dutiful subject to King Edward, and he may well defy the whole world to prove so black an act against him."

"There thou art wrong, my lord," exclaimed Mabel Calcraft, who had hitherto stood a silent auditor to this conversation. "I myself am evidence against him, and, unhappily for me, none else has such good reason for knowing the truth of what you have just heard."

"What knowest thou against the honour of the Duke of Northumberland?" vociferated Dudley, fiercely.

"This paper," replied Mabel, taking a small packet from her bosom, "will best explain how well I can substantiate the charge that has just been made against his Grace. It is the warrant given to me by the Duke, and being signed with his own name, will leave no doubt of its genuineness."

Lord Guildford Dudley glanced hastily over the page, and as his eye detected the well-known handwriting of his father, his countenance assumed a deathly paleness, and dropping the warrant upon the ground, he said faintly :—

"This must be a forgery.—My father is not so low sunk in crime that he would engage in so fearful a deed as murder; and even had he been inclined to destroy the young king, he would hardly have been so mad as to have given you a paper which might afterwards be produced in evidence against himself."

"Nor would the Duke of Northumberland have given me this warrant unless I had refused to execute his commands without it," answered Mabel. "Finding me resolute, however, he at length gave me the paper, and the King perished some days earlier than he otherwise would have done."

"Then *you* were the murderer of the hapless Edward?"

"I was—but your father was the instigator of the deed. Nay, more, the crown was aimed at for himself; and a few days would have witnessed your own, and the Lady Jane's death, by command of the same ambitious noble. Thus the way would have been cleared for him, and the proud Northumberland would have grasped a sceptre to which he had no right, save that of power."

"Merciful Heaven!" cried Lord Dudley, "can it be possible that my father has to answer for such crimes as these?"

"Aye, nor are these all," replied Mabel. "Ambition has ever been his guiding star :—for sovereign power he would have sacrificed those nearest and dearest to him; and as a proof of his dishonour, news has just reached London that he has proclaimed Mary, Queen of England, in the hope of thus saving his miserable existence from the wrath of her who would not be much longer withheld from her just rights."

"Vile hag, thou liest!" roared Dudley, fiercely.

"Oh, think of me as thou wilt, proud lord," answered Mabel, with cool indifference, "believe me to be the liar thou hast called me, and wait till a few hours shall confirm the words I have spoken. Yet again, I say, Northumberland is a traitor to the cause he undertook; and further do I affirm, that when next you hear of him, it will be that he is a state-prisoner in the Tower of London."

"If this sad news is indeed true, where in Heaven's name did'st thou hear it?" demanded the Lady Jane.

"The news," answered Mabel, "reached me in the fortress, from whence you and your husband have just escaped. It was during the bustle occasioned by the arrival of this intelligence that I was enabled to bring my Lord Guildford Dudley from his prison cell."

"And they told thee that my father had proclaimed Mary, Queen of England?"

"They did."

"Then he, at least, will escape the doom to which he would otherwise have been subjected!"

"Not so, my lord," replied Mabel Calcroft, "for at the same time I heard that he had been arrested and was already on his way to London, where he is to be thrown into confinement till preparations can be made for his speedy trial."

"Yet surely they will not doom him to death after having declared himself in favour of Mary!" cried Dudley in an agony of grief.

"His subsequent conduct will, I believe, have very little effect upon those who have vowed his utter destruction," answered the old woman. "Among his bitterest enemies are the two Ambassadors, Simon Renard, and Monsieur de Noailles, besides the Earls of Arundel and Pembroke, who have all sworn never to cease their persecutions till they have brought him to the scaffold. These are enemies, my lord, not to be thought of lightly, and having once declared their resolution, the chance is that my Lord of Northumberland has not many days to pass in this life ere he expiates the many heinous crimes of which he has been guilty."

Lord Guildford Dudley was about to put still further questions to Mabel, but at that moment a stranger, entered and drawing her aside, whispered some intelligence of which he was the bearer, and which seemed to fill her with alarm. At length, by her command, the stranger retired from the room, and then advancing towards Jane, she said in a tone of the greatest alarm :—

"My dear lady, I have just received news that assures me that this place is no longer one of safety. The Lords of the Council have discovered your escape, and judging that you have flown hither for security a party of soldiers has been dispatched to convey you back to the prison from which you have with so much difficulty escaped."

Heaven's will be done!" cried Jane with resignation;" my fate draws to a close, and I care not how soon my doom is sealed by those who seek my blood."

"Nay, you must not perish without an effort to escape," exclaimed Mabel;—"your lives may yet be saved,—a boat lies moored on the banks of the river and it may it not be too late to elude your pursuers."

"And whither can we go that the malice of our foes will not seek us? asked Dudley, bitterly. "No, our destinies seem to be wound up: the hour of tribulation has arrived, and rather than prolong my miseries by a useless flight I will at once surrender myself into the hands of those who have been sent to capture me."

"A most wise resolution, my good lord, depend on it," exclaimed the Earl of Arundel, who at that moment burst into the chamber followed by a strong party of soldiers. "Flight could not save you now with all these blood-hounds at your heels, and it will therefore be better to submit to the mercy of her Majesty, Queen Mary, who now possesses the throne of which she was wrongfully deprived."

"I ask no mercy at her hands, neither do I expect any," answered Lord Dudley, with haughtiness. "The Lady Jane and I are now prisoners in your hands, and the only favour that I would deign to ask of my enemies, is, that they will treat my wife with that tenderness and consideration which her high rank has a right to demand."

"In that matter," replied the Earl of Arundel, "I have no influence, or whatever power I might possess should be exerted in her behalf. Queen Mary, however, is not so vindictive as her enemies have reported; and, I dare say, the Lady Jane Dudley will be treated in all respects as her high rank may merit."

"There is but one favour I would ask," cried Jane, "and that one is not very difficult to grant. I have a faithful female domestic whom I would have for a companion in my prison solitude, and surely it is not too much to expect that so small a favour will be granted."

"Your request shall be named to the queen," answered the Earl of Arundel, "but I grieve to say that my present orders are that no one shall be suffered to share the confinement to which you are to be subjected."

"Do I hear right?" cried Jane, with indignation. "Is my cousin Mary then so cruel in her sudden rise to power that she would deprive me even of the society of my husband?"

"My instructions are to place you both in different parts of the Tower," replied Arundel. "The orders, however, may only be temporary, and, probably, in a few days the queen may be graciously pleased to grant any moderate favour you may think fit to ask."

"Alas! my lord," answered Jane, "a few days may place me far beyond any further tortures that the queen or her blood-thirsty council might otherwise be pleased to inflict upon me. Doubtless, her majesty will think it prudent for her own security on the throne to send me speedily to a scaffold, and in that event, I shall have, at least, to thank her for sparing me much torture and suspense."

"These expressions of warmth are ill-timed, my lady," exclaimed the Earl of Arundel. "At present you know not that her majesty is so vindictive an enemy as you seem to imagine, and therefore it would be better to wait until some real cause gives reason for complaint. And now, my Lord Dudley, I ask of you whether there is any particular favour you would solicit ere we set forth on our return to London."

"There is one," replied Dudley, "but in all probability it will be refused as was done in the case of my young and suffering wife. I also have a faithful attendant whose company I would have with me. Gilbert Hemmingsley is well known to you, my lord, and it now only remains to see whether you will grant or refuse my request."

"It is granted," answered the Earl of Arundel. "The person of whom you speak is a faithful and zealous friend, and I would be loathe to deprive you of his services, since they are so anxiously desired. Let him attend you to the Tower, but I would have him understand beforehand that his captivity will be in every respect as rigid as your own."

"I am ready to share even death with my honoured master," exclaimed Gilbert Hemmingsley, stepping forward. "Nay, if my own head would satisfy the accursed rage of his foes, I would cheerfully resign myself into the hands of the executioner and die, blessing those who suffered me to become so willing a sacrifice."

"Bravely spoken," replied the Earl of Arundel, "though to speak the truth, I rather think the boast will never be put to the test. However, I must congratulate my Lord Dudley in possessing so faithful a follower; and having done so, it next becomes my duty to announce that our barges are waiting for us on the rver, and I shall hardly escape without a rebuke, if any unnesessary delay takes place in conveying my prisoners to their place of destination."

"Are a few minutes then of such consequence that they will be grudged us by our insatiate enemies?" asked Dudley. "Are not the lords satisfied with having us in custody, but they must think even a brief delay too great a favour to bestow upon those who are now powerless in their hands."

"Let us not ask for any indulgence," cried Jane, advancing towards the Earl of Arundel. "For my own part I am ready to quit this place whenever your lordship shall think proper to command."

"And I," added Lord Dudley, also advancing; "perhaps I was unwilling to quit this noble domain, the happy scene of my birth and childhood, and now the last place in which I shall ever breath the air of liberty."

"Ere we depart, my lord, I must request that you deliver up your sword into my hands," exclaimed Arundel.

"It is yielded," answered Dudley, after a brief struggle with his feelings—"take it, my lord, it is yours, and now, when it is your will, let us take our leave of home."

"Your squire must also deliver up his," said Arundel—"with such a weapon he has nothing now to do, but if ever he leaves the Tower again, it shall be returned by the same hands that are now extended to receive it."

"You shall take my life ere you deprive me of my sword!" exclaimed Gilbert Hemmingsley, furiously. "I am no prisoner of your lordship's, neither will I surrender up a weapon that I may have need of among the many enemies by whom my master will presently be surrounded."

With these words Gilbert threw himself into an attitude of defence. At a signal from the Earl of Arundel, however, a couple of soldiers advanced, and ere the squire was aware of their intentions, the weapon was wrested from his grasp, and he stood defenceless before his foes. This done, the Lord Guildford Dudley and the Lady Jane, followed by the faithful squire, were conducted under a sufficient guard across the lawn in the gardens, and from thence down to the river's banks, where a number of barges were awaiting the arrival of the Earl of Arundel, his prisoners, and the soldiers who had been employed in this affair.

As the Lady Jane passed down the noble stream, and gazed upon the rich and varied banks on either side, a rush of melancholy thoughts crossed her brain, and bitterly did she weep for the ease with which she had been prevailed upon by the Duke of Northumberland, to accept of a crown which had brought with it so many sorrows. Not, however, that her own probable fate had any share in the sad thoughts which thus filled her brain, but she reflected upon the ruin which her present situation would bring upon many who had generously advocated her cause; and yielding to the sorrows that now filled her soul with sadness, she sank her head upon her husband's shoulder, and gave free vent to those sobs of anguish that could no longer be suppressed. Dudley would have chided her for her want of firmness at this trying moment, but when he gazed upon her tearful eyes, his own heart smote him for the thought, and pressing her fondly to his bosom, he said:—

"Cheerly, Jane,—cheerly!—this is indeed an eventful moment to us both, but I had thought to have seen thee bear up better against misfortune, and now when I see thee drooping like a sweet flowret in the whirling tempest, my own heart yields to its sorrows, and I could weep even as thou dost thyself."

"Nay, if my tears afflict thee, I will look gay," cried Jane tenderly. "I will smile in spite of all the sorrows with which we are surrounded, and happy,—most happy, will it make me, should my own efforts deprive thy heart of a single pang. And yet, why should I repine at the slippery trick fortune has played us? From the beginning, I expected nothing but the storm that has burst forth and now howls over us, and so that I alone were to be the sufferer by it, I should not care how soon I sank beneath it."

Lord Dudley made no reply to this, and in silence they passed on the remainder of their way, until their arrival at old London Bridge, where the violence of the current, and the rapidly-growing darkness of the night, occasioned no little danger to the party, as they passed through the narrow arches of the venerable fabric. They, however, succeeded in overcoming the difficulty, and then by the faint moonlight the prisoners saw before them the frowning walls and battlements of the terrible fortress which was soon to close on them in all probability fo ever, Not a sound, however, escaped the lips of any of them, and in silence, broken only by the dashing of the oars, they passed on to Traitor's Gate, which, on a signal being given by the Earl of Arundel, was opened for the reception of the passengers. Upon entering these gloomy looking portals, a great glare of light fell upon them, from the numerous torches which were carried by those who were waiting at the water's edge for the arrival of the captives. Soon after this the barge in which the prisoners were was rowed against the landing place, when the Earl of Arundel, rising from his seat, took the hand of Lady Jane, and conducted her to the shore. Lord Dudley and Gilbert Hemmingsley followed immediately afterwards, and when all were once more together, they ascended a steep flight of steps, which led up to the ramparts, where Lord Dudley and his faithful attendant were led one way, while Lady Jane was conducted by another, towards the place which was to be her prison cell.

And now the harsh tones of a well-known voice fell upoon the ear of the fallen queen, and looking round, she perceived by the horrid glare of torch-lights, the fierce and malevolent countenance of Simon Renard, gazing upon her with a fiendish look of gladness, that betrayed the triumph which filled his soul at this consummation of his wishes. At thi sight she buried her face in her hands, when, led by the Earl of Arundel, she entered a small and scantily furnished chamber, which she was informed had been allotted for her use, until another apartment could be prepared for her reception. In a minute afterwards she was left alone,—the feeble rays of a single lamp served to show the gloom of her present abode, and contrasting it with the former luxuries she had enjoyed, the hapless Lady Jane Dudley threw herself upon a couch, and wept over the sorrows to which she was doomed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OF THE STATE IN WHICH QUEEN MARY WENT TO VISIT THE TOWER OF LONDON.—THE PROCESSION DESCRIBED.—THE VARIOUS PAGEANTS IN HONOUR OF THE EVENT.—ARRIVAL AT THE TOWER:—AND HOW CHRISTOPHER DUMPS IS UNEXPECTEDLY HONOURED.—THE RISE OF CERTAIN MEN UPON THE RUIN OF OTHERS.—A BRIEF CONFERRENCE BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND SPANISH AMBASSADOR.—NORTHUMBERLAND'S FATE DRAWS NEAR.

THE 3rd of August, 1553, was an eventful day for England, for there t was that Queen Mary took upon herself the title of Queen, and from that period till her death, the Roman Catholic Religion was restored with all its worst features of intollerance;—the blood of many eminent reformers being shed, in order to back things to the state in which they had been found by King Henry the Eighth.

On the day above named, Mary rode from Bow Bridge, where she was joined by her sister, the Princess Elizabeth, and and a numerous company on horseback, of all the lords, spiritual and temporal who were favourable to her cause. These conducted her with great state through the suburbs of London, until they came to Aldgate.

Here was the first of the six pageants. It consisted of a tabernacle of two floors, resembling roadlofts;—in the lower of which, sat a fair young lady in the likeness of St. Mary, with many virgins on every side of her, and in the higher story, was another lady in the likeness of St. Ursula, also with a great multitude of virgins, right goodly dressed and arrayed. Above all, was a representation of the Trinity. On each side of both stories, was a small square tabernacle, with proper vanes, and in every square was a garter, with the motto, inclosing a red rose. On the tops of these tabernacles were six angels, casting incense on the Trinity and the two saints. The outer walls were painted with hanging curtains of cloth of tissue, blue and red; at some distance before the pageant were set two great posts, painted with various devices, and surmounted by a lion rampant, holding a vase, painted with the arms of England. The whole work was of carved timber, and was gilt and painted with biss and azure. Both the saints addressed the Queen, in long poetical "propositions," which the curious reader will find in the Antiquarian Repertory.

The second pageant was erected in the broadest part of Grass-church Street. In the middle of the street, where the "water runneth into the channel," was fixed a high foundation of stone of three or four feet high, having a sufficient passage for the current of water as usual; on which foundation was erected a castle, formed of timber, but covered with canvass, painted to resemble masonry. Within a man's height from the stonework, were battlements, ornamented with various badges. In some parts also were clouds, with beams of gold in a blue firmament; in other places white harts, and in others peacocks displayed. Above this first battlement was a great gate, with folding doors, full of great bars of iron, and many nails, and over the gate a large portcullis, having in every joint a red rose; over this gate, as it were on the stone work, were the queen's arms, supported by goodly beasts, that on the right side, being a red dragon, dreadful, and the other, on the left, a white greyhound; and a yard from these arms on every side, was a great red rose of half a yard's breadth. Above this gate was another course of battlements and badges like the former. Beneath, in the opening, stood a knight, armed cap-a-pie, as a captain, or venturous knight, named Policy. The building stretched on each side into the adjoining windows and shops, with two other portcullises embattlemented and ornamented with numberless repetitions of the badges and other royal insignia, already described, and at each corner of this middle story and great tower, was a turret, decked with roses, greyhounds, portcullises, and St. George's crosses, of white and red, each turret having at top seven sides, and on each side a pinnacle and a vane. Yet above all this great story was another somewhat smaller, leaded above, and gaily painted; its four sides being like rag and flint stones, with hollow crosses, windows, and gun-holes, and on the top, great vanes, with the queen's arms, and at the summit of the whole, a red, fierce-looking dragon, holding a staff of iron, and on it a great crown of gold. In this upper story was another large door, wherein stood a knight in armour, called Nobility; and on his right hand, a

bishop who was named Virtue. The knights and the bishop all delivered long poetical addresses, excessively loyal, it is true, but most annoying and wearisome. The horse-ways and foot-passages were under the wings of this pageant, which was called the castle of Portcullis.

The third pageant,—that of the moon, was adjoining to the Conduit in Cornhill. Its form was square, being painted like free-stone, for three feet from the ground, above like brick, and then environed by a cornice with two rolles, the lower of white and green, and the upper of black and yellow; and between the rolles, various badges. Before the principal front were three pillars, two painted like green marble, and the centre of red; on one of the green pillars was a red dragon, and the other a red lion, each with a shield of the royal arms. Within the pageant was a bench (used by the speakers in succession) very thickly ornamented with green chequers, having in every cross a red rose with a white in its its middle, and to the whole a fringe of red. The walls were similarly ornamented with other devices. Above was a blue sphere with the moon, planets, and stars, and in the circumference the signs of the moon; at the corners, without the sphere, were four angels. Above this sphere, sat Raphael, the astronomer, who delivered a long "proposition" in verse, as did other characters representing Philip, King of Spain,—the intended husband of the queen,—the prophet Job, and somebody else whom the learned called Boethius.

The great Conduit in Cheap ran with Gascony wine,—of which the populace made excessively free, besides which, there was music to excite the mirth even of the most melancholy.

The fourth pageant,—that of the sun,—was in Cheapside, between the great Conduit and the Standard. It was cornered by four great posts, on which stood the royal beasts, or supporters, a red dragon, a white hart, having round its neck a golden crown and dependent chain, a red lion rampant, and a white greyhound. In the face of this pageant was a wheel, wonderfully wrought about with clouds; below it a white scutcheon with St. George's cross, and a red sword,—probably intended for the City arms;—in the two lower corners were two astromers, one with a triangle, and the other with a quadrant, having their attention entirely devoted to the Heaven above. Upon the upper part was represented the Father of Heaven, and in the corner, by his side, two angels with trumpets, and bearing shields of arms, together with written passages of scripture. Within the middle of this great wheel, there was a chair or throne, near which stood a female, intended to represent the queen, beneath whom were four stars constantly revolving round a representation of the earth. In the breadth of this wheel there were a variety of figures of bears, lions, horses, serpents, fishes, mermaids, bulls, virgins, naked men, and rams, stuck full of stars as they are appropriated and named in books of astronomy, having lines red and white, drawn from each star, planet and sign, and after the aspect that naturally they have to each other;—in short, as on a modern globe. Near the wheel were stationed three armed knights, who, whilst the procession was passing ascended and turned the wheel very swiftly. The upper part of this pageant was richly wrought with pinnacles and hollow lanterns, with many windows; and it was richly painted and gilt both within and without.

The fifth pageant, called the Temple of God, was at the Standard in Cheapside. In its front, to the height of a man, it had a large red rose, supported by the white grey-hound and red dragon; and in other parts were great lions, dragons, and greyhounds of lead, painted. Above all this was a throne, surrounded with many candlesticks of gold, and wax tapers burning, and handsome books and flowers; within this throne sat the Godhead, and about him innumerable angels, singing harmoniously, to a sweet and solemn air, as if it had been in a church. At the four corners of the building, on great posts, were four sage persons, arrayed after the ancient fashion, some with strange hoods, and some with hats, and their robes set full of pearls; these were intended for the "Prophets," or, probably, the four Evangelists. The roof terminated like the last, and every niche of the whole was covered with counterfeited pearls of silver. At this pageant, the queen heard a sermon from one of the prelates of the church.

At this place her majesty was joined by many others who came to grace her progress, and when all had been properly marshalled by the the heralds, the procession moved towards the Tower in the following order:—

First came, on horseback, the Mayor of London, in crimson satin, with a rich collar of gold about his neck, having before him the sword-bearer, and, after him, the recorder, in black velvet, the two sheriffs, and the twenty-four aldermen in scarlet, and their servants, well horsed and attired. After they had saluted the queen, they rode on, clearing a passage through the streets, followed by the kings and heralds of arms, in their coat-armours of velvet and gold. Next appeared six gallants of the Earl of Essex, freshly apparelled in yellow sarsenet, with many ostrich feathers, mounted upon noble steeds, trapped and bedecked with silver bells, and advancing their horses after a most curious fashion—in other words—exhibiting all their skill in their manage. After them rode the gentlemen belonging to the Duke of Lancaster, then those belonging to the Duke of Buckingham, and after them the knights and squires of some of the chief nobility. Then came the

Dukes of Lancaster and Buckingham, and the Earl of Kent, and their trumpets, sackbuts, and other musical instruments out of number. After these, a great number of gentlemen who had taken up arms in the queen's cause, and who were now placed in a situation of honour to grace the triumph they had helped to achieve.

After these, came Queen Mary, on horseback, surrounded by her chief nobility and followed by a great number of Roman Catholic divines, all of whom had been distinguished for their zeal in the cause of the church they advocated. Her apparel was rich, after the fashion of the time; and upon her head was a little broad rimmed hat, like that of a cardinal, stayed by a lace of gold; her hair, which was dark and glossy, hanging down about her shoulders. Her own footmen, as well as a great number of the gentry, were around her in great numbers.

Immediately following her rode eight leaders, the wives and daughters of the nobility, all of whom were apparelled in cloth of gold. After this came a horse-litter, and then four young ladies, maids of honour; their palfreys led by footmen, then a spare palfrey led by the queen's master of the horse, who was himself on horseback; then four spare horses with rich saddles and stirrups of gold; after which, came five chairs, containing as many noble ladies of the land, each followed by six ladies and gentlewomen on palfreys. The cavalcade was closed by the yeomen of numerous nobles and gentlemen, all of them being attired in the rich liveries of their several masters.

The sixth and last pageant was in Tower Street, and was not inferior in beauty and ingenuity to any of the rest. It had many pillars; and, between each, pictures of lions, dragons, and greyhounds. On each side was a great pair of stairs, and on the floor at their head stood the seven Virtues, three theological, and four cardinal, that is to say—Faith, Hope, and Charity; Justice, Temperance, Prudence, and Fortitude; and about them many young maidens in white garments of powdered ermines. Above them were three seats; in the centre, sat Honour, in purple velvet; and in the others, were two cushions, with a sceptre and coronet. Above were tabernacles, pinnacles, arms, and badges of various descriptions.

At this spot the Lord Mayor and corporation stopped and waited for the queen; and, on her approach, presented her with a great plenty of plate, silver and gilt; being basins and pots, filled with a great sum of coin; which, of course, her majesty was most graciously pleased to accept, and for which she returned thanks—as her flatterers declared—"with a most amiable countenance and demeanour, and after a most learned manner."

When this piece of exquisite foolery was over, the procession again moved on; and, shortly afterwards, her majesty, attended by this splendid retinue, entered the Tower, where she was greeted with a speech as laudatory to herself as was a similar congratulatory one addressed by the very same personage only a very few days before to the unfortunate Lady Jane Dudley. The queen, however, was pleased to express her high approval of the loyalty with which she was welcomed to the royal fortress; and then, passing forwards, she proceeded to the Tower Green, where numerous troops and spectators of various degrees were drawn up to greet her arrival with their hearty huzzas.

Among the most conspicuous in this place were the two gigantic warders, who, having elbowed their way to a good place to see and hear all that passed, had placed little Christopher Dumps upon a window sill, where he also could participate in the enlivening scene that was taking place. Indeed the little fellow vociferated his loyalty with so much enthusiasm, that Queen Mary's attention was directed towards him; and smiling at the ridiculous figure he cut, she sent one of her attendants to bring him nearer in order that the dwarf might obtain a more uninterrupted sight of the gay ceremony that was then going forward. Christopher was much flattered at this mark of royal condescension, and having been lifted from his place of eminence by the good-natured Hugh, he followed the messenger, and presently afterwards had the satisfaction of finding himself placed within a few feet from her majesty.

By this time all those who had been confined in the Tower on account of their adherence to the Roman Catholic Religion, were released and brought into the presence of their illustrious mistress. Many of them had been in captivity for years past; the rigour of confinement had left its impress upon their pale and careworn countenances, and Mary could scarce suppress her tears when she beheld the ravages that disease had made in many of those who in earlier times she had ranked among her most esteemed friends. To all of them, however, she addressed herself in tones of kindness, promising them satisfaction for the wrongs they had endured, and consoling them with the prospect of immediately restoring the religion as it had existed in former times.

At length her eye fell upon the countenance of Bonner, who was advancing towards her, and addressing him in a tone of easy familiarity, she said:

"Welcome to my Lord Bishop of London;—this is indeed a happy day that once more restores to me so many valued and dear friends."

"Your majesty does me honour by the recognition after so many years of painful separation," answered the prelate, falling on his knees and kissing the hand that was extended towards him. "And yet," he continued, as by the queen's command he rose from his posture of humility, "your majesty has been pleased to address your faithful servant by a title that no longer belongs to him."

"There your lordship is wrong," answered Mary. "Ridley, it is true, has till this moment possessed the holy office, belonging of right to yourself; but it is my will that he should be made to yield up his priestly throne to one who I think proper to honour."

"Pardon me, your majesty," exclaimed Bonner, "but may not such an act, so early in your reign, create discontent, that it may not be easy to subdue?"

"Who should dare dispute the rights of a sovereign to rule according to her own will?" cried Mary, with that haughty resolution which formed so prominent a feature in the character of her imperious father, Henry the Eighth. "I have seen, my good lord bishop, the religion I revere overturned for the advantage of a few;—our altars have been uprooted, our monasteries razed even to the very dust, our hallowed images despised and spit upon! I have seen this, Bonner, when I had no power to prevent it. But now, I am queen instead of subject; my word, therefore, will not pass as nought, and by our gracious mother, I swear amply to repay back the injuries my friends have suffered for their zeal in a holy cause! Again I say, thou art Bishop of London, and mark me, my Lord of Arundel, it is my will and pleasure that Ridley this night sleeps in a prison cell within our Tower of London!"

Then turning towards another worshipper of the rising sun, she exclaimed:—

"Gardiner! we are well met to day; thou art the second who I have resolved to elevate from the lowly condition to which you have been produced, and as a token of my regard for your many noble sacrifices, I hereby name you to succeed to the vacant Bishoprick of Winchester."

"Your Majesty is ever bountiful," answered Gardiner with assumed humility, "but surely you have forgotten that the see is already occupied."

"Aye," answered the queen, "and by a heretic whom we have all just reason to execrate. The see, I tell thee, is thine; and, moreover, thy constancy and virtuous fortitude under extreme difficulties, shall be still further rewarded with the first place of honour and profit that becomes vacant."

As she said this, the queen was about to move forward, when an aged man, whose countenance bore the impress of long and severe sufferings, threw himself on his knees before her. For a minute or two, Mary could not recognise the person or features, but at length starting with an unfeigned horror, she exclaimed :—

"Surely, my eyes deceive me! and yet methinks even in the wreck that has been left, I can discover my good friend and faithful adherent, his Grace of Norfolk?"

"Your majesty has guessed truly," answered the venerable duke; "and yet I marvel greatly that you should be able to trace even the faintest likeness in one who has been so many long and weary years a prisoner in the Tower of London."

"That thy sufferings have been great I am but too well aware," cried Queen Mary with commission. "My heart has often bled for thee when my thoughts were directed towards thy cheerless cell; but what was pity, my lord duke, when my utmost efforts could not mitigate one pang thou wert doomed to suffer."

"This moment, my gracious liege, repays me for years of torture," cried the Duke of Norfolk, as a tear of gratitude fell upon the hand of his royal mistress. "To have lived thus long is indeed a happiness, and now I care not how soon I find eternal rest in the tomb that yawns for me."

"Nay," cried the queen, "your grace must not talk of dying so soon after your restoration to liberty. Your rank, titles, and estates are all from this moment conferred upon you, in token of my esteem; and, as one of my privy council, I hope long to have the benefit of your advice whenever exigencies shall call upon you to give it."

"Now Renard, are you satisfied?" whispered De Noailles to the Spanish Ambassador. "The queen has been restored according to your wishes; the Catholic worship is revived, and little more remains to restore the country to its former state of peace and happiness."

"Thou hast strangely mistaken my purpose, Monsieur de Noailles, if thou supposed I am yet satisfied," answered the Spaniard, in the same subdued tone. "The queen is not yet married, and, till she is wedded to the husband of my choice, the purpose directs all my actions will not have been successfully terminated."

"Hah!" returned De Noailles, "I remember, thou art now about to try to negotiate a marriage between her Majesty of England, and thy master, Philip, King of Spain. Am I right not in my conjecture?"

"Thou art De Noailles."

"Then will thou fail most signally!"

"Indeed! and wherefore, may I inquire?"

"Because I am commissioned by my master, Henry of France, to bring about the union between the queen and one who for the present must be nameless."

"Nay," exclaimed Simon Renard, "thou need'st make no secret of the matter, for, in truth I know all about it. You would see Mary wedded to one of her own subjects; in fact, you would have her wedded to young Edward Courtney, an especial favourite of her highness; and one of those who she has just released from the dungeon of this fortress. Am I not right, De Noailles, in the conjecture I have ventured to make?"

The French Ambassador was too much perplexed to answer this question; and, luckily for him, at the very moment the Earl of Arundel approached the queen, to know her pleasure with respect to the state prisoners, who were now confined for the part they had taken with Queen Jane during the last few days.

At first, Mary seemed perplexed what answer to give to these questions; but presently, recovering herself, she inquired the names and numbers of those who were waiting the decision that was to consign them to a dreadful doom. Upon this the Earl of Arundel hastily read over the list of names until he came to that of the Duke of Northumberland.

"Hah!" she exclaimed, "that is a traitor that must not escape the penalty he has brought upon himself. He has been the chief actor in the late scene which had nearly robbed me of a crown; and, by the virgin, he must be made to suffer for his treason."

"Your majesty, he is now a prisoner in the Tower," answered the Earl of Arundel. "The fox has been trapped at last, and it shall go hard indeed but he meets with the deserts his crimes so justly merit."

"Let the trial take place at the earliest opportunity," cried the queen. "It would be cruel, perhaps, to keep him in suspense as to his doom,—and to say the truth, Arundel, I care not how soon that dangerous man is removed from my path. My crown will be hardly safe whilst he lives; and to your care I leave the task of bringing the affair to as speedy a termination as may be possible."

"A few hours will serve to make the necessary preparations," answered the Earl of Arundel. "In the meantime, I will so bestir myself that your majesty shall have no occasion to complain of my zeal."

"Well spoken, good Arundel:—and the lords,—do they understand that it is my wish Northumberland should die?"

"It is so understood," replied the nobleman; "and even if it were not so, their own wishes are directed towards that result; and had the ambitious duke a thousand lives, they would all be sacrificed to the vengeance of his foes! But there is yet another of whose fate I would learn from your majesty's wishes—The Lady Jane Dudley —"

"Hah!" interrupted the queen, "must she die too?"

"That will depend upon your highness's pleasure."

"Then let her fate, and that of Lord Guildford Dudley, be reserved for future consideration.—They are both young, and have been made the victims of this intrigueing duke. I may spare their lives, Arundel, but see that they are carefully guarded, lest they escape from custody."

With these words the queen moved forward; and shortly afterwards she entered the state apartment which had been prepared for her temporary reception.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOW LADY JANE'S MISFORTUNES CROWD MORE THICKLY UPON HER.—SHE IS VISITED IN HER IMPRISONMENT BY THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR.—LEARNS THE DOOM THAT AWAITS THOSE WHO TOOK PART IN HER CAUSE.—MEETING BETWEEN LADY JANE AND LORD GUILDFORD DUDLEY.—QUARREL BETWEEN THE AMBASSADOR AND THE VICTIM OF HIS HATRED.—SIMON RENARD NEARLY RECEIVES THE REWARD OF HIS VILLANY.

CLOSELY confined and narrowly watched in the small chamber to which she had been consigned by the newly-exalted sovereign, Jane at once conceived the object of her enemies, and prepared her mind to meet that doom which she knew to be in store. From her cousin Mary, she had nothing to hope but a speedy death; whilst from Simon Renard and others who had taken part against her in the late brief struggle, she had to expect but that counsel which would urge the queen to send her fallen rival to that scaffold which, at the period of which we write, was so frequently used by tyrants against those they sought to put out of the way.

For a short time Jane was suffered to be alone, but even this indulgence was too great in the opinion of those who triumphed in her downfall; and, consequently, Renard, who experienced a fiend-like exultation in the misery of his hapless victim, hastened to her temporary prison in order that he might himself be a witness of the miseries he had himself so industriously propagated.

As he entered the gloomy chamber of the royal captive, a look of ill-suppressed triumph was evident in his dark, brutal countenance—he glared upon the wretched princess as the tiger regards the prey he is about to spring upon, and seeing that she turned from him with a feeling of hatred and disgust, he strode forward, and, seizing her hand, replaced her in the chair from which she had risen in some alarm at his approach.

"Your royal highness," he exclaimed, "cannot help betraying the ill-feeling with which you regard one who may not prove so great an enemy as you conceive. I am here on a charitable errand, if you will only permit me to explain the motive of my visit."

"The motive," answered Jane, "cannot be a good one, that has brought Simon Renard into the presence of her he has successfully plotted against."

"Say rather, lady," exclaimed the wily Spaniard, "that your own prejudices will not suffer you to think favourably of a man you believe to be an enemy."

"Nay," returned Jane, reproachfully, "one whom I know to be a most insidious and persecuting foe."

"Hah!" exclaimed Renard, "dost thou still persist in yielding credence to those tales which are invented only to ruin me in your good opinion? Is there no way by which I may prove the falsehood of those evil-minded men, whose interest it is to bring these unfounded charges against me?"

"Am I to understand from Monsieur Simon Renard, that he is now anxious to serve the unfortunate?"

"That, lady, is my desire."

"Then use the interest you possess in prevailing upon her majesty to restore those to liberty who are now languishing under her displeasure. Bid her open the prison doors of those unfortunate captives whose lives are dependant upon her mercy, and I will believe you to be the friend your words would induce me to imagine."

"There your grace asks more than I have it in my power to grant," answered the Spaniard. "I would fain do your bidding, but the queen has just cause of complaint against those who took part in your cause, and any attempt to move her in their favour, would only serve to increase the probability of her vengeance. There is, however, one who I would gladly intercede for, and whose life I could save on certain conditions."

"And that one, Monsieur Renard is ——"

"Yourself, madam," interrupted the Spaniard. "Aye, you start, but in spite of the course I have hitherto taken against you, it is now my earnest desire to save you from the fatal consequences of the rashness that has involved you in the peril of a speedy and violent death."

"And which peril," answered Jane, "I shrink not from meeting, so that I could but know the vengeance of my rival was satisfied. My father, my husband, and the Duke of Northumberland are at this moment prisoners in the hands of her majesty. I would entreat their lives from her; and on condition that my earnest prayer is granted, I can willingly yield up my own life as a sacrifice for the mistaken zeal of my faithful friends."

"You have asked too much," exclaimed Simon Renard. "The persons you have named are the chief conspirators in the game so lately played, and I know that nothing short of their death will ever satisfy the just indignation of the new sovereign. Your father has been too deeply implicated in the recent plot to be easily pardoned;—the Duke of Northumberland is justly regarded as the mainspring by which the whole conspiracy was moved; and, with respect to your husband, it is well-known, that even now he has not altogether given up the hope of obtaining the crown, which the voice of the people has bestowed on another."

"Nay," sighed the Lady Jane, "adversity hath ere now cured him of his ambition. Once it is true, he looked eagerly for an opportunity to grasp the sceptre of England, but now he would be content to pass the remainder of his days in that seclusion and quietude, where alone calm, domestic peace is to be found."

"And what certainty has the queen that Lord Guildford Dudley has learnt such a lesson of humility?" demanded Renard. "Past experience has made her wary, and the advice of her friends is that those who are known to have been her opponents should be prevented doing any further mischief."

"Then their council is to send me and my friends to the block?"

"Some of them will certainly meet the fate they so justly merit," answered the Spanish Ambassador. "Among those who will fall beneath the headsman's axe, are the Dukes of Northumberland and Suffolk—"

"Hold!" cried Jane in a voice trembling with horror; "spare me, I entreat, the catalogue of victims, and hear the last and only favour I have to ask:—let me be the first to suffer, that I may be unconscious of the dreadful scenes it will be the pleasure of Queen Mary to enact."

"You do her majesty injustice," cried Simon Renard; "the queen is not desirous to shed the blood of her subjects, but the advice of her friends compels her to make a few examples in order to strike terror into the hearts of her foes, and those who may be doomed to die will be selected from among the leaders of the late rebellion."

"And why not be satisfied with the shedding of my blood, since I alone was the fatal cause of all the mischief?" demanded the Lady Jane.

"Because," answered the Spaniard, "her majesty is well aware that you were only made the instrument for Northumberland's own ambitious projects. She pities, rather than blames the indiscretion that induced you to listen to evil counsel; and, from what I understand, your life will be spared on condition of passing the remainder of your days within one of the dungeons belonging to this fortress."

"And this her majesty calls mercy!" cried Jane, bitterly. "She would have me live, that the remainder of my existence may be passed in the horrible reflection that all those whom I most loved, have fallen by the axe, whilst I am preserved from a doom which I deserve at least

as much as themselves. Such a punishment would be far more horrible than that of death, surrounded though it might be with all the terrors of the scaffold."

"But you forget," observed the Spaniard, "that her majesty may hereafter relent so far as to restore you to liberty."

"And what would be liberty," asked the Lady Jane, "to her who will have been widowed by the axe of the executioner?"

"Again you mistake the queen's motives," observed Renard. "Your husband's life may be spared as well as your own; liberty may be restored to both, and it is not improbable that you will yet have to acknowledge the injustice you have done the character of Queen Mary."

"Have I no other warrant for Dudley's safety than your own words?" asked Jane.

"And is it not enough," demanded the ambassador, "to have the word of one who has acted so prominent a part throughout this business? Have I not brought about the change that has given your throne to a rival, and can I not as easily save the lives of those for whom I may be inclined to ask for mercy?"

"True," sighed Jane, "but recent events have convinced me that I have nothing but evil to expect at your hands."

"Still art thou obstinately bent on giving me credit only for evil, when I am most anxious to serve thee," exclaimed the perfidious Spaniard. "I pity thee as a victim crushed by those who sought to raise themselves through your means, and, as a proof that I would do more than serve thee by mere words, I have ordered the guards to conduct Lord Guildford Dudley hither, that you may have one more interview with him ere he is taken to the prison to which he has been ordered by advice of the council."

"Monsieur Renard!" cried Jane, "this may be said to excite a hope which it is never your intention to gratify! You say I am to behold my dear lord once more; if there is truth in that promise, conduct me to him without delay."

"It is unnecessary that you remove from hence," answered Renard, "for your husband is now in the adjoining chamber, where his guards are only waiting my commands to usher him into your presence."

"Why then do you hesitate?" exclaimed Jane, impatiently; "why thus torture two hearts that have already suffered so much?"

Simon Renard made no reply to this, but hastening to the door, he whispered a few words to one of his attendants who was waiting there, and immediately afterwards Lord Dudley, surrounded by a strong guard, was conducted into the room. In an instant the unfortunate pair rushed into each others arms, and whilst they were thus for a moment unconscious of what was passing about them, Renard signed for the guard to retire into the next room, and then folding his arms across his chest, he stood watching the two fallen victims, and exulting in the certainty that he could now securely crush them whenever circumstances should render it necessary to do so.

In the meantime, Jane had sunk nearly fainting into the arms of her husband, and it was not without some difficulty that he succeeded in restoring her to animation. At last, however, with an effort she shook off the lethargy that had enchained her soul; and, happily, at that moment a flood of tears come to her relief. Dudley beheld with grief the intense anguish of his suffering wife, but assuming an air of gaiety, he entreated her to look forward with hope; and, if possible, to forget the events of the last few days which had driven them from a palace to a prison.

"Alas!" she sighed, "what hope remains for those who have fallen into the hands of merciless enemies? For my own fate, dear Dudley, I care not, but my heart sinks with apprehension when I think of those who must be involved in the same ruin, that overwhelms myself."

"Then there, Jane, believe me, thou dost wrong," answered her husband with forced serenity. "Our present fall is but temporary; friends, faithful to our cause, still remain, and rely upon it they only wait the first favourable opportunity that may offer, to place us once more in the enviable situation from which we have been driven."

"Dudley!" exclaimed the Lady Jane, earnestly, "for my sake—for your own, cease to entertain any further hopes of regaining a throne which is lost to me for ever. Nay, hear me,—for even if all obstacles were removed, and the sovereign power were again offered me, I would refuse to accept it, choosing rather to remain in that more humble and peaceful lot which my own soul yearns for."

"Then believe me, Jane, thou wouldst do wrong," cried Lord Dudley, "for not only have you right on your own side, but the reformed religion of your country demands some sacrifice in its behalf. Already have some of our most eminent divines fallen under the displeasure of the bigotted Queen Mary, and I much fear that many will be doomed to suffer at the stake for advocating a doctrine milder and more charitable than that which is followed by her who now usurps your throne."

"My Lord Dudley would do well to remember that he speaks in the presence of one who favours the cause of the sovereign he is pleased to speak of in such disrespectful terms!" exclaimed Simon Renard approaching. "I have overheard your words, young lord, and would warn you against indulging in a course that may prove your own ruin."

"Hah!" cried Dudley, impatiently; "you have turned eaves-dropper, and would earn the favour of Mary by betraying those who are already in her power!"

"Oh!" answered Renard with indifference, "you can judge of me with what contempt you please; fortunately, I am well able to bear your reproaches, though it may chance to be in my power to make you feel the evil consequences of offending, who has the means of sending you to the scaffold."

"Villain!" exclaimed Dudley, "thy words move me to madness. I am, as thou says't, in thy power, but at least I will make one effort to release the world of a monster, whose soul thirsts only for blood and vengeance."

Darting, as he spoke, suddenly upon the Spaniard, he seized him by the throat with so firm a grasp, that there is no doubt he would have carried his threat into execution, had not the screams of Lady Jane instantly brought the guards into the room. In an instant, Lord Guildford Dudley was forced to relinquish his hold, and again he stood surrounded by the soldiers who had been employed to conduct him to his dungeon. Upon recovering himself, Simon Renard gazed upon his victim with a look of mingled hatred and scorn, and then addressing himself to the officer in command, he desired him to convey his prisoner to the dungeon without further delay. It was in vain that the Lady Jane implored that their interview might not be thus broken upon. Renard was obdurate, and, in spite of Dudley's efforts to break from them, he was dragged from the room by the guards, and hurried across the green to the Tower in which his dungeon was situated. This done, the Spaniard slowly took his departure, leaving the Lady Jane a prey to those griefs which pressed upon her with such acute and overpowering violence.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ENGLISH WARDER AND SPANISH AMBASSADOR.—A VIEW OF ANCIENT LONDON.—STEPHEN MARTEL BECOMES A HISTORIAN.—THE TOWER DESCRIBED.—SIMON RENARD RECEIVES A HINT THAT PROVES RATHER UNPALATABLE.—THE AMBASSADOR SEEMS BENT UPON FURTHER MISCHIEF.

PURSUING his way across one of the court-yards, Renard was mentally exulting in the triumph he had achieved over his adversaries, when approaching footsteps roused him from his cogitations, and looking up, he saw at no great distance the form of Stephen Martel, one of the warders, who, with a huge bunch of keys in his hand, was making his way towards one of the doors belonging to the White Tower. As Simon Renard approached, the man respectfully saluted him, and was then passing on, but the other hastening towards him, enquired what duty he was now on, and whether he had under his care any of the numerous prisoners who had lately been put into confinement by order of the council. The latter question was answered in the negative; but in reply to the former, he was told by Stephen that he was about to visit the roof of the White Tower, in order that from thence he might see whether all was quiet and secure. Renard had often wished to see the view from that eminence, and putting a gold coin in the warder's hand, he asked and obtained permission to accompany him in his ascent to the summit of the White Tower.

Immediately upon this they entered the door, and from thence they proceeded up a winding staircase, rendered still more difficult by the many broken steps and the vast quantity of accumulated rubbish with which they were encumbered. At last, however, all these obstacles being overcome, they reached a low doorway, which, being opened by Stephen, gave them admittance to the roof. Here Simon Renard paused for a few minutes in speechless wonder at the magnificent view that burst upon his sight. London, with its crowd of houses, churches, and stately buildings, lay at his feet:—the River Thames rolled silently and magnificently along, bearing upon its placed bosom innumerable boats and stately barges belonging to the nobility and chief gentry of that period. Beyond all, lay the quiet green fields with which London was then surrounded; and, judging from the serenity observable in every part of the view, no one would have believed the important business,—nay, the violent struggle that had just taken place to dispossess one sovereign and place another on her throne.

"This is a noble prospect, my friend," said Renard, recovering from the astonishment that had at first enwrapped his soul;—"methinks you and your country have good cause to be proud of the nation that can produce such a scene as that which lies before us."

"Why, for that matter," replied Stephen, "I have so often looked upon it that the prospect is now scarcely or never heeded. To be sure there is the Tower itself lying at our feet:—*that*, I must say, is something to be proud of, especially when you reflect upon the many historical scenes that are connected with it."

"And some of which, by-the-bye, are not very creditable, I believe," answered the Spaniard. "Imprisonment has been endured here, and blood shed like water;—aye, and that blood too, the very noblest of your land."

"That may be true," returned the warder, "but, forgetting those things if you can, there is still enough left to render this place interesting to the lover of his country. I know the history of the place by heart, and will, if your excellency pleases, relate some of the chief incidents connected with the building that surrounds us."

"Proceed, my friend," answered Simon Renard;—"I have a short time to spare and will cheerfully devote it to hearing the particulars of this cheerless looking place."

Stephen Martel conducted his auditor to a part from whence the whole of the fortress was embraced in one view; and then taking his place by the side of the Spaniard, he thus commenced:—

"I have heard it stated, sir, and I believe there is no doubt as to the fact of the Romans having erected a fort on this site, and it is very probable that they fortified the banks of the river, as the situation was so desirable. The first building known to have been erected here, is the Tower, on which we know stand, which was built by William the Conqueror, in the year 1080, who entrusted the work to Gundulph, Bishop of Rochester. Historians inform us that it was greatly shaken in the year 1090, by a violent tempest of wind, which, amongst other damages, blew down six hundred houses in the City; which misfortune was repaired, and a castle was built under the same Tower, on the south side, which was castillated round about at a great expense. And yet this Tower stood in need of further help in 1155, when Thomas a Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Chancellor to King Henry II, caused it to be repaired again. In 1190, Longchamp, Bishop of Ely, encompassed the premises with a wall and ditch; and in this work, in a very arbitrary manner, broke into and deprived both the church and the Holy Trinity, the Hospital of St. Catherine, and the City of London, of some of their lands; for, after he had enclosed the Tower and Castle with an outward wall, he caused a deep ditch to be dug round from the south-east point to the south-west corner of the wall, in order to surround it with the Thames, in which work the mill belonging to the brethren of St. Catherine's, and standing on the site of Iron Gate, was removed, and part of a garden, which they had let to the king at six marks per annum, was rooted up, and, for the most part, laid waste; and another piece of ground towards the east, belonging to the priory of the Holy Trinity, near Aldgate, worth half a mark per annum, was taken from it; and the City was deprived of all the ground from the White Tower to the Postern Gate.

"In 1239, King Henry III., in order to overawe the citizens, and to make them the more readily submit to his exactions, added several bulwarks, but they were so much damaged by an earthquake in the following year, that his majesty commanded them to be restored and augmented; which, when finished, consisted of a stone-gate bulwark, and other fortifications on the western side."

"Truly, friend warder," observed the Spaniard, "you seem to be intimately acquainted with every particular relating to this place."

"It is a part of my business to be so," answered Stephen; "but perhaps your excellency is tired of my narrative, and in that case I ——"

"Nay," replied Renard, "my patience, I dare say, will last me to the end—proceed, and I will at least promise not to go to sleep till you have finished your narrative."

"Well then," resumed the warder, "I was going to observe that King Edward I. so highly approved of what had been done by Henry, that he commanded his treasurer and chamberlain to take certain sums of money out of his exchequer, for finishing the work of the ditch, then newly made about the bulwark, now called the Lion's Tower, from the lions and other wild beasts lodged therein by the king's command, supposed to be the fancy of Henry I., who greatly delighted in those foreign animals. By-the-bye, I never could bear *foreign animals* in my life, and I only wonder how ——"

"Go on with your narrative, man, and never mind your likes or your dislikes just at present," interrupted the Spaniard, to whom this latter observation seemed to convey something very personal. "You were speaking of certain improvements that had been made:—resume your narrative, and bring it as speedily as possible to a conclusion."

"Well," continued the warder, "we have now reached the period of Edward IV., who added to the fortifications, and inclosed with a brick wall a piece of ground, taken out of Tower Hill. He also ordered to be erected, a scaffold and gallows for the execution of offenders."

"Hah!" exclaimed Simon Renard, "that was, doubtless, done as a terror to all evil doers. By the mass, but it was a good work, and I see your succeeding sovereigns have not thought proper to remove it."

"No," answered Stephen Martel, "it stands, as you may perceive, yonder, and much hath it been employed when our kings have wished to frighten their subjects into submission by the terror of example. Henry VIII., for instance, gave good employment to the executioner; and, unless I am much deceived, her present majesty will not fail to send a few of her subjects to the same place of punishment."

"You are right, good warder," exclaimed the Spaniard. "Mary knows the virtue to be produced from terror, and it shall be no fault of mine if many of her disobedient lords do not bow their necks to the block for daring to raise against her the standard of insurrection."

"And unless I am greatly deceived," observed Stephen Martel, "the Duke of Northumberland will be amongst the very first to fall beneath the headsman's stroke."

"Hush!" exclaimed Renard; "we may be overheard, and I would not that any one should learn a secret that it may be dangerous to disclose. And yet, friend, I cannot help telling thee that thou art not very wide in thy guess—the Duke of Northumberland's hours are numbered!"

"And at thy instigation?"

"Ask no further questions, but proceed with thy description of the fortress," exclaimed the Spaniard:—"go on, for I now begin to feel more interested in the history of this place."

"I will now proceed," resumed the warder, "to point out to you the various buildings connected with this fortress, and to relate any particulars connected with them, that may appear worthy of notice. Yonder circular edifice, for instance, is called the Bell Tower; at a short distance from which, to the north, is the Beauchamp Tower, which has always been one of the principal state prisons. It takes its name from Thomas De Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, who was imprisoned here in 1397, previous to his banishment to the Isle of Man. The chief prison-room is a spacious apartment on the first floor; and adjoining to it are two small cells, intended for the better securing of refractory prisoners. In that room was confined Queen Anne Boleyn, the unfortunate mother of the Princess Elizabeth, our present sovereign's half sovereign."

"Anne Boleyn," observed Simon Renard, "was the great enemy of our religion, and therefore her fate causes but little commisseration in my bosom. Proceed to the next building, to which my finger points, and be as brief as possible in your explanation."

"That," answered Stephen, "is the Devereux Tower: it is of older date than the last-name building, and consists of two stories; the walls at the base being eleven feet in thickness."

"And what called you yonder one?"

"The Flint Tower."

"And the next?"

"The Bowyer Tower, which takes its name from having been the residence of the master and provider of the king's bows. It is vaulted and groined; and in the walls, which are about ten feet thick, are three recesses, in each of which is a narrow embrasure. There is a tradition that it was in this room that George, Duke of Clarence, brother to Edward IV., was secretly put to death by drowning in a but of malmsey."

"By my troth, Master Stephen, this place seems not to be wanting in deeds of blood and violence," exclaimed the Spaniard. "Victims have ever been found to fill its dreary prisons, nor has tyranny been wanting to a cruel and sanguinary death."

"But your excellency has not yet heard half the horrors with which the history of this place abounds," answered the warder. "The innocence of childhood and helpleſsness of old age, have been equally disregarded whenever state purposes required the death of a victim."

"And who, amongst your English monarchs, has done most towards earning a name for tyranny and intollerance?"

"To answer that question," replied Stephen, "may bring my own life into jeopardy. It is dangerous to speak the truth when it happens to be against great men; and yet my lips can scarce refuse to give the chief work of oppression to one who has not been very long in his grave."

"I understand," answered Renard; "you allude to his late majesty, King Henry the Eighth?"

"I do."

"I have heard of his deeds," replied the ambassador. "Henry's wrath—like a raging tempest—swept all before it; it was indeed terrible, and yet I am much mistaken if his daughter proves not a worthy scion of her impetuous sire."

"So I have thought," exclaimed Stephen; "the fortress is now filled with those who took up arms against the queen, and there is but too much reason to fear that mercy is not to be expected for those who have failed in an enterprize that was intended to deprive her of a throne."

"Nay, perhaps we do her an injustice," cried Renard. "The lives of her chief foes must, doubtless, be sacrificed as an example to rebels; some in particular I could name, to whom mercy cannot be extended."

"And one of them, if I mistake not, lies captive in yonder town," observed the warder, pointing in the direction to which he alluded. "The Duke of Northumberland has transgressed beyond forgiveness, and he, doubtless, will be the first to experience the queen's thirst for vengeance."

"Aye," exclaimed Renard with a look of triumph; "if all the rest escape, *he* must die!"

"But the Lady Jane," interposed the warder, eagerly; "she, weak and inexperienced as she is, has been made a tool of by those who would have raised her to the throne. Her life, at least, I hope will not be sacrificed to satisfy the vengeance of a few enemies?"

"That," replied the ambassador, "will depend on circumstances. The Lady Jane professes what is called the Reformed Religion. Let her abandon that and embrace the holy tenets which will soon be prevalent in these dominions, and her life may yet be spared."

"And are those the only terms on which she is to expect mercy?"

"No other alternative will save her."

"Then I fear her doom is already sealed," answered Stephen. "The Lady Jane may be in error, but even the terrors of death will fail to convert her to the Roman Catholic Faith."

The Spanish Ambassador made no reply to this, and turning sulkily upon his heel, he desired to be conducted from the place as speedily as possible. This command Stephen was not disposed to resist, and having once more glanced around him to see that all was quiet in the immediate neighbourhood of the Tower, he motioned to Simon Renard, and then commenced his descent from the lofty eminence to which they had not long before climed. As they once more reached the Tower Green, Renard, in a few words, thanked his conductor for the trouble he had taken for him, and then turning away moved slowly off in the direction of his own lodgings.

CHAPTER XXXV.

NORTHUMBERLAND FINDS HIMSELF IN A SITUATION OF EXTREME DANGER;—IS SUMMONED TO APPEAR BEFORE THE COUNCIL.—MABEL CALCROFT EXULTS IN THE DOWNFALL OF THE DUKE.—THE TRIAL.—THE PLEADING.—THE SENTENCE.—THE LAST INTERVIEW BETWEEN NORTHUMBERLAND AND LORD GUILDFORD DUDLEY.

Upwards of a week had passed away since the committal of the Duke of Northumberland to a prison, and during the whole of that time he was left in the most harrowing suspense as to the fate for which he had been reserved. Still, however, he maintained his usual fearless deportment; conversing cheerfully with those few who occasionally visited him, and never once enquiring the pleasure of the queen and her council, in whose hands his destiny was east. He even spoke to those who he knew to be his enemies, of the part he had taken in the late affair against Queen Mary, and, as if to provoke his doom, bitterly regretted the overthrow of a design which he maintained was intended only for the peace and happiness of the dominion.

At length word was brought him that the next day was appointed for his trial before the peers; that the charge to be preferred was treason against her present majesty; and that in the event of his being found guilty, there was every certainty of the last sentence of the law being carried into full effect. All this the fallen duke heard with perfect composure; and having merely asked a few questions of the person who had been sent with the message, he desired to be left alone, in order that he might make what hasty preparations he could for his coming trial. Of course this request was complied with, and having been provided with pens, ink, and paper, he sate down and busily engaged himself in preparing the best defence he could against those charges which he knew would be most strongly urged by those who sought his destruction.

This done, he read passages from some of the religious books which had been supplied him, and having thus fortified himself to bear up against the vindictive feelings of his obdurate foes, he retired to bed little caring how soon they might carry the fell designs into execution, since he well knew that the persecutions of the queen and her adherents would never cease on this side the grave.

On the following morning, after a hasty breakfast, he was by the lieutenant of the Tower and an officer belonging to the royal body guard, who came to convey him to the hall, in which were to assemble, the judges who had been appointed to try him on the charge of high treason. Even up to this moment, Northumberland was firm and dignified—he obeyed the summons with alacrity; and having made one or two important arrangements relative to the coming event, he took his place between the two officers, and proceeded down stairs, where a large body of soldiers was waiting to conduct him to the presence of his judges.

As the unfortunate prisoner passed onwards, he looked anxiously round upon the vast concourse of persons that had assembled together to witness the procession. But among all the throng, he observed not a single friend who seemed to pity the misfortunes into which he had fallen. In fact, a sullen look of satisfaction marked every countenance; and, in some instances, murmurs of exultation were heard issuing from the crowd, at the fate which, in all likelihood, awaited him. Still, in despite of all this, Northumberland maintained his usual firmness, and passing onwards with a dignified demeanour, he had nearly reached the place of trial, when an unwonted bustle was observed in one part of the crowd, and shortly afterwards, Mabel Calcroft rushed forward, until she had nearly reached that part of the procession in which the prisoner was walking.

"Aha!" she cried in a tone of exultation, "do I then meet thee thus at last, proud Duke?—Behold, how the mighty are fallen, even to the very verge of a blood-stained grave!"

"Leave me, woman!" exclaimed the Duke, with perturbation; "thy presence at such a moment as this, is more painful than even the thought of death itself."

"When thou hast answered me," exclaimed the old woman, "I will depart.—"Say, duke, dost thou recognise her who now stands before thee?"

"Too well!—too well!" replied Northumberland—"thou art one who calleth to my mind a scene that I would gladly have forgotten."

"Hah! 'tis well!—thou art now made to feel remorse for the crimes thou hast committed. This day will the murdered king appear in judgment against thee, and I shall hear the sentence pronounced against one, to witness whose downfall I have alone wished to live. Let me but know thy doom, and I shall die content."

"My lord," exclaimed Northumberland, "I entreat you let this mad woman be dragged from hence. She raves of things I know nothing about, and her presence does but serve to embarrass me when I have most need of firmness to face those I am called to appear before."

"Nay, they shall not need to drag me away," cried the old woman. "I will depart of my own accord, proud Duke, but remember, we shall yet meet again—aye, even though it be at the moment when the executioner's axe is raised to strike off the head of the victim!"

Uttering these words with a yell of fiend-like triumph, the old woman suddenly disappeared, and once more the procession moved on to its place of destination. A few steps further served to bring them to the front of the hall, where the guards filing off on either side left a free passage for the prisoner and those who were to accompany him to the place of trial. Still, the Duke of Northumberland lost none of that firmness for which he had ever been so conspicuous; and when he was conducted to the bar which had been prepared for his reception, he bowed to those nobles with whom he had formerly been familiar, and some of whom even now pitied the hapless condition to which he had been reduced.

By this time the peers were all assembled, and a few of the usual preliminaries having been gone through, the indictment was read, charging him with the commission of many crimes, to have been found guilty, of the least of which would have been sufficient to ensure for him the death so much desired by his enemies. This done, the president of the council enquired of the prisoner how he intended to plead to the charges he had just heard read.

"My lord," replied Northumberland, "it is not my intention to aggravate my crimes by the utterance of a falsehood. That I am guilty of advocating the cause of the Lady Jane, in opposition to that of her cousin, is but too well known to all here present."

"You admit the allegations then?" said the president.

"I do, my lord."

"And have you anything to urge why sentence of death should not be passed against you?"

"Nothing," answered Northumberland. "For myself, I have no fear, though there are those for whom I would most earnestly plead for mercy."

"Name the parties, and any request you may choose to make shall be laid before her majesty."

"I have sons," replied the Duke of Northumberland, in a voice trembling with emotion, "for whom I would ask mercy, if not pardon."

"Your request shall be made known," answered the president; "but at the same time it is my duty to observe that they have taken a prominent share in the guilty transactions for which you this day appear before us.

"That they have done so, my lord, is not to be denied," returned Northumberland; "but what I would urge is, that they were induced to act the part they did in fulfilment of their duty to the commands of a father. It was I who commanded them to take up arms against the Princess Mary, and surely justice will be amply satisfied in the death of the chief instigator of the alleged crime."

"That must remain for her majesty's decision," replied the president. "For my own part, since you have confessed your guilt, it only remains to pass that judgment which is always accorded to those whose offences against the state have been of equal magnitude with yours."

Upon the conclusion of these words a profound and awful silence reigned throughout the hall, during which the president proceeded to pass sentence of death upon the noble culprit. This done, he next enquired of the prisoner whether there was any other request he wished to make previous to being sent back to his former place of confinement.

"I would ask," replied Northumberland, "that my death may be that usually accorded to those belonging to my rank and station. The axe, my lord, according to general opinion, confers less disgrace upon the culprit than does the cord."

"Proceed," exclaimed the president; "if you have any further request to make now is the proper time to prefer them."

"I would have a clergyman of the Reformed Church attend me during the few hours I may yet have to live," answered the duke. "Probably but a brief period remains between me and eternity, and I would pass that interval in soliciting pardon for my sins."

"All your requests shall be attended to," answered the person he had addressed. "Her majesty shall hear your last requests, and, doubtless, she will be mercifully disposed to grant every favour and indulgence even to one who has proved himself so dangerous an enemy."

"There is yet one other request that I had almost forgotten," exclaimed Northumberland. "It is in favour of the Lady Jane, who, unhappily, has been made but too prominently to appear in those recent events which have brought me to this hapless flight. I would ask that her share in this late transaction, should be visited with as light a punishment as possible. Let it be remembered that she is but a weak and helpless woman; that she hath been, as it were, dragged into a position that she would have shrunk from, and that he who most deserves punishment has already received the doom which will ere long send him before a higher and far more awful tribunal."

"That is a matter in which we cannot promise to interfere," replied the president.

"Then," groaned the unhappy nobleman, "the wretched, deluded Lady Jane is lost!"

"Not so," answered the president; "for the queen will not prove revengeful towards those who took no great part in the late treason against her. She knows that the Lady Jane was forced into the step she took, and, therefore, it is not unlikely that her life will be spared in the event of her agreeing to certain conditions."

Having said this, the court rose, and the prisoner was removed, a procession being formed to conduct him back to the prison from whence he had not long before been brought. On this occasion, the executioner walked before the victim with his axe turned so that the edge was *towards* the prisoner—a form usually observed in such cases, by which the multitude who witnessed the procession could ascertain the fate of the party who had been put upon his trial.

On their return, they were again met by Mabel Calcroft, who no sooner beheld the certain signal of the doom which had been passed upon the duke, than raising a cry of triumph, she pointed out to the crowd the inverted axe, and called upon them to raise a shout of joy for the judgment that had fallen upon the object of her hatred. Nor were the people slow in obeying the exhortation of the old woman, and the hideous noise that burst forth from the multitude had not died away when Northumberland once more entered his dreary, lonesome cell.

The first act of the doomed culprit on reaching his prison, was to throw himself upon his knees and pour forth earnest prayers to heaven for pardon and forgiveness. This done, he rose more calm, and resigned to the doom which he now knew was irrevocable, and turning towards the Lieutenant of the Tower, he enquired whether he might be indulged with a brief interview with his son, Lord Guildford Dudley. This, after a moment's hesitation, was granted. A guard was despatched to fetch the younger prisoner; and as the youth entered the presence of his father, the lieutenant and his followers left them to themselves, merely contenting themselves with keeping a strict watch to prevent the possibility of either of the prisoners escaping. Upon being thus left alone, the duke threw himself upon the neck of his son, and earnestly besought forgiveness for one who was now standing upon the very verge of the tomb.

"Forgiveness!" exclaimed Dudley—"what means my father? for what has he to ask pardon of a son who owes him all filial gratitude and love."

"Alas, poor boy!" cried Northumberland, "have I not by my fatal persuasions. induced thee to join heart and soul in a cause that has failed and reduced thee to a state of fearful jeopardy? Is not thy life hazarded, and do I not know that mine was the act which has brought thee to so sad a flight?"

"And do I not glory in the cause which, though lost, was one of honour as well as of religion. If we risked much, it was for the sake of our Holy Church; and having failed in it, should we not meet death as men who glory in that which they know to have been just and righteous?"

"Thy magnanimity would, under any other circumstance, be most gratifying to me," answered Northumberland. "As it is, however, I cannot but regard myself as the luckless cause of sending thee to a prison—perhaps even to death."

"Death has no terrors for me," replied Lord Guildford Dudley. "My life was valuable to me only so long as I could benefit my beloved country:—that moment has, I fear, passed away for ever! Bigotry and intollerance now rise predominant in our country: those who oppose the court in their religious doctrines will be marked out for vengeance; and rather than live to witness the crimes that will follow Mary's accession to the throne, I would perish by the most dreadful tortures it is in their power to inflict."

"Nay, speak not thus I conjure you," cried the duke, earnestly. "I have been the cause of all, and no persuasion in the world will ever prevail upon me to regard myself in any other light then as the destroyer of my children."

"Is it thus then, that you would torture yourself in the last few hours allowed you by your cruel adversaries," exclaimed the young man, trembling with emotion.

"Hah!" exclaimed the Duke; "thou knowest then already that I have received my doom from Queen Mary's judges?"

"I do—I do!" answered Dudley with agony. "The officer who brought me hither has told me all;—he said you pleaded guilty to the charge; is it indeed true that you acknowledged that to be treason, which was intended for the benefit of the country it is our duty to serve."

"That I did so is most true," replied Northumberland, "and the step was not taken without mature deliberation. I know the rancour that existed in the hearts of those who were appointed to try me;—that they were resolved upon my death, and why therefore should I seek to prolong an investigation which, after all, must have terminated to my disadvantage."

"True," replied the young nobleman, "and Mary will not fail to carry into execution the doom that her friends have seen fit to pronounce. She will gladly bring you to the block with all possible speed, an act which I fear, is only preliminary to the fearful atrocities that will be perpetrated by that vindictive woman."

"As a last request," said the Duke of Northumberland, "I asked of my judges to intercede with her majesty to spare the lives of my children. They may perhaps yield to the prayers of a wretched father, and it remains only to know that my sons will escape the perils of this fearful tempest of passions, and then I can lay down my head upon the block with quiet resignation to the will of my judges."

"I would that thou hadst not asked them so much," exclaimed Dudley. "Bloodthirsty as they are, I would have them take full vengeance upon myself, since pardon from their hands could never atone for the death of a father, whose chief crime consisted in placing himself in opposition to her who now occupies the throne. Even though life were granted me, I should still array myself against her as an enemy, whose soul was bent upon releasing an oppressed country from the hands of a tyrant."

"Speak not thus, Dudley, I conjure you," cried Northumberland, with anxiety. "Remember, your single arm can effect but little against the present government, and, above all things, do not forget the terrible ruin that my own precipitancy has brought upon all those whom I most loved and revered."

"And do you also remember," answered Dudley, "that those who have fallen with you, do not blame the noble spirit that called them into action. They knew the penalty of failure, and are now willing to meet whatever doom the tyranny of their foes think proper to inflict."

"But I cannot so readily forgive myself," replied the duke. "I am now approaching the termination of my earthly pilgrimage, and if any thing can assuage the bitterness of death it will be the certainty of having the forgiveness of those who I have involved in the same danger."

"If you seek pardon from me, my father," cried Dudley, "it is granted from my very soul. I forgive any share you may have had in prevailing upon me to join in a cause that I consider righteous and just, but in doing so, I must again declare that even had you been adverse to it, I should have taken part against Queen Mary, whose right to the throne was barred even by the act of her father."

"Alas! my son," exclaimed the Duke of Northumberland, "to hear you speak thus would at one time have filled my soul with rapture and admiration. Now, however, it only serves to weigh down my soul with alarm for your future safety."

"And wherefore should it do so?" asked Dudley.

"Because I know your proud spirit will scorn to accept any terms of conciliation that may be offered by our enemies," replied the duke. 'I have besought them to have mercy upon my sons, and your present speech convinces me that any good offices they may propose will be rejected with scorn and contempt."

"I am indeed truly sorry that you asked ought on my account," cried Dudley;—"it was an act of humiliation that I would have gladly seen avoided. It will give your foes ground for triumph, and heaven knows they have cause enough for that already."

"Would you have had me die then without making one effort to rescue my children from the same death that had just been pronouced against myself?"

"I would," replied Dudley, "for the death you would have averted from your sons is not so terrible as to live and witness the scenes of cruelty that will shortly follow."

"For myself, I asked no mercy," exclaimed the Duke of Northumberland, proudly. "Death, after all, is perhaps the last boon they could bestow upon me, and there is but one thing that I should wish to live another hour for."

"And what is that?"

'To witness an act of vengeance against him who hath been the chief instrument in bringing us to this pass."

"Of whom do you speak, father?"

"Of Simon Renard!"

Dudley was about to reply, but at that moment the Lieutenant and his guard entered the chamber to summon the young man from the presence of his father. A brief time only was allowed for parting, and as his son was, for the last time, torn from his embrace, the old man sunk upon the floor, completely overcome by the intensity of his own sufferings.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW MABEL CALCROFT WAS SENT ON A MISSION TO THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND, AND THE SUCCESS SHE MEETS WITH.—PROCESSION TO THE CHURCH OF ST. PETER AD VINCULA.—THE RENUNCIATION OF FAITH, AND PRIDE'S LAST FALL.—SIMON RENARD'S TRIUMPH IS ACHIEVED.—RETURN TO THE DUNGEON.

It was on the 18th of August, 1553, that Northumberland received condemnation of death, and two days afterwards as he was meditating in his cell upon his sudden fall from grandeur, he was roused by hearing the door opened, and the next moment one of the guards appeared, leading in Mabel Calcroft, the latter whom remained in the dungeon, whilst her conductor retired to keep watch at the entrance. Northumberland was somewhat startled when he perceived so unwelcome a visitor, and regarding her with a look of anger, he demanded what had brought her to his prison at such a moment.

"To save you," she replied.

"Nay, woman, say rather to mock and insult my misery."

"Well, perhaps you are not altogether wrong, proud Duke," she replied scornfully. "I do indeed rejoice to behold your downfall, and yet for all that I am come to point out the ready means to obtain your deliverance."

"How! my deliverance, say you?"

"Aye, your life will be spared on one condition."

"And how know you that?"

"Because I have been sent to tell you so by those who have the power of life or death in their hands."

"I see," exclaimed the Duke of Northumberland; "my enemies have some great point to gain, and they take advantage of my present weakness to effect their object. Speak, woman, am I not right in my conjecture."

"I am sent to *ask*, not to *answer*, questions," returned Mabel.

"Then proceed with your business at once!—what would you with me?"

"I would urge you to renounce the Protestant faith."

"Indeed!—and is that the object of your visit?"

"It is. Your foes will spare your life on condition that you embrace the Catholic religion."

"Why," demanded Northumberland, "should they wish to make a renegade of me?"

"That your example may be followed by others," answered the old woman. Many will renounce their heresy when once the Duke of Northumberland has become a convert to that religion which will now become paramount throughout these fair dominions of England."

"And you say the reward of my apostacy would be—"

"The preservation of your life."

"How have you been informed of this?"

"Through those who can save you upon the conditions I have named. Simon Renard is one, and his influence with the queen, at this moment, is not to be despised."

"That villain would betray me," cried the Duke: "woman, return to him who sent you hither, and say that I scorn to receive assistance from his hands!"

"Your grace," exclaimed Mabel, "had better reflect before you return such an answer as that. Remember, you are condemned to die, and the execution of your sentence is ordered to take place on the day after to-morrow, unless you consent to the proposition that has been made."

"Hah! would they hurry me to death so soon?"

"Therein lies their only safety," answered the old woman. "Simon Renard knows well, that whilst you live there are friends who will come forward in your defence."

"Then why does he offer me pardon on condition that I renounce my religious faith."

"Because he hopes that so illustrious an example will be followed by many others, who, at this moment, firmly refuse to renounce their heresy."

"Then return to him," answered Northumberland, proudly, "and say that I refuse his offered mercy upon such vile terms as he has proposed."

"This is absolute madness!" cried Mabel Calcroft, who was not easily to be deterred from the prosecution of her project. "Life should be purchased at almost any cost, and surely it is not too much to ask you to become a convert to that religion which the queen herself supports."

"Then," cried the duke, "mercy, if I understand you rightly, will not be extended to me on any other condition?"

"None other," she replied; "so farewell, my lord duke—you are obstinate in your heresy, I see; and since all persuasion is in vain, I leave you to the contemplation of your certain doom."

"Stay!" cried Northumberland, as he perceived she was about to retire; "upon whose word am I to rely for pardon in the event of my acceding to this demand?"

"Upon the queen's."

"But will she keep faith with me?"

"Aye—that will she," replied Mabel, placing a written paper on the table before him;—"sign this, and from that moment you will be safe."

"Tell me first," exclaimed Northumberland, "what is the nature of the document you have thus come prepared with?"

"It is a petition to the queen's gracious majesty, that she will pardon you on condition that you renounce your religious errors. Sign it, my lord, and thus preserve yourself from the doom that is so nearly approaching."

The Duke of Northumberland struggled for some time with his feelings; but at length, a desire to secure his own personal safety, seemed to get the upper hand; and snatching a pen from the table, he hastily put his name to the document before him.

"Your grace has done well," exclaimed Mabel, taking up the paper, and placing it for security in her bosom. "This shall instantly be laid before the queen; and, no doubt, you will shortly be summoned before the Archbishop of Canterbury, in order that the recantation of your errors may be made with all possible speed. And now I bid your grace farewell, trusting that you will cheerfully rely on the queen's mercy, and perform the promise you have just now given.

With these words, Mabel Calcroft departed from the dungeon, leaving the fallen duke to reflect upon the ruin and degradation that had at last overtaken him. Hour after hour he waited in anxious expectation of some message arriving to command his presence before the queen, but not a soul visited him after the departure of Mabel; and at length, oppressed with watching and anxiety, he threw himself upon his humble pallet, and sunk into a disturbed sleep, in which appeared to him visions of a most appalling and fear-inspiring character.

Early on the following morning he again woke to be harrassed with reflections upon all that he might now have to endure. He felt that he was about to degrade himself in the eyes of the world—that the Catholics would despise him for his want of moral energy, and that his Protestant fellow-subjects would execrate him as an insidious foe to the cause he had so lately sworn to advocate, even at the peril of his life. And now he beheld himself ready to renounce all rather than meet that doom which brought to his mind so many terrors.

Thus passed the day in painful thoughts; and, on night arriving, he was once more about to seek his humble pallet, when his prison-door was thrown open, and a guard entered to conduct him to the Church of St. Peter's, where the archbishops, bishops, and peers of the realm, were assembled to witness the abduration and disgrace of a man who in power had offended them, and whose ruin occasioned a feeling of triumphant joy.

But the duke thought not just then of his humiliation, and taking the place assigned to him in the procession, he quitted the cell, and after threading numerous passages, arrived, at length, at one of the court yards; across which they proceeded towards the sacred edifice where his enemies were anxiously awaiting his arrival. As he entered the church, he found that it was densely crowded with those who came prepared to exult in his fall; but making his way towards the throne on which the Archbishop of Canterbury was seated, he threw himself upon his knees before him, and in that humble position remained until it should please the primate to command him to rise.

"John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland," exclaimed the archbishop, in a solemn tone, "thou hast sent a humble petition to the queen's majesty, asking pardon for thy former offences, and as a token of thy humility promising to renounce thy heresy, and to become henceforth a true and faithful son of our Holy Church. Say, art thou still inclined to do as thou hast said?"

"I am," answered the duke, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Thou wilt entirely renounce the false and damnable heresy thou hast hitherto followed; promising from henceforth to place thyself under the banner of the only true religion, and resolving to fight in its defence rather than again see this kingdom fall beneath the sway of Satan. Wilt thou engage, heart and soul, to root out the falsehood that evil men have exchanged for the blessings they enjoyed previous to the reign of her majesty's father, the late King Henry the Eighth?"

"I will," responded the abject duke.

"Dost thou acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope in all spiritual affairs?"

"I do."

"Art thou truly penitent for all thy former errors, both against the church and the queen's gracious majesty?"

"I am truly penitent," answered the duke.

"Thou hast been condemned to die both as a heretic and a traitor against thy lawful sovereign, and would now ask mercy of her most gracious majesty Queen Mary?"

"Such is my humble desire."

"And on condition of thy pardon being granted, thou wilt pledge thy knightly word henceforth to acknowledge no other monarch than her who at this time occupies the throne of these realms?"

"I will acknowledge none other than her,"' answered Northumberland.

"And dost thou express thy deep contrition for having taken up arms against her?"

"From my very soul I do."

"Then thou grantest that the Lady Jane Dudley was an usurper without right or title to the throne she sought to deprive her majesty of?"

"I declare my entire conviction," answered the duke, "that Queen Mary is alone the rightful sovereign of these realms."

"Again I ask thee, is it thy desire to be reconciled with the Holy Church of Rome, and to be received once more as a repentant and faithful son?"

"It is."

Then the archbishop taking some holy water in his hand signed him with the cross, and having repeated a number of prayers and exhortations, bade him arise from his knees, as he was now pardoned for his heresy, and admitted a member of the Catholic community. Northumberland rose with a humbled air, and without venturing to look round upon the vast assembly that had been collected together to witness his humiliation, he inquired of the archbishop whether he was now at liberty to return home, or whether he was still to remain a prisoner in the Tower.

"At present," returned the prelate, "you will remain within this fortress. So far I have obeyed the orders of the queen, and it now only remains for her majesty to dispose of you according as her wisdom may suggest."

"Hah!" exclaimed Northumberland vehemently, "then I have been betrayed and entrapped by my enemies!"

A smile of fiend-like satisfaction passed over the countenance of

Simon Renard as the prisoner uttered these words, and stooping over the shoulder of the archbishop, he whispered:—

"Had not your grace better order his instant removal? "He may grow furious upon this discovery, and a dungeon will be the fittest place to repress his violence."

Northumberland heard these words of his arch-enemy, and would have replied to them, but at that instant, on a motion being given by the archbishop, he was seized upon by two of the guards and hurried away to the dungeon he had not long since quitted. It was in vain that the unfortunate prisoner supplicated for pity; all were deaf to his entreaties, and once more he was left in solitude and misery.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NORTHUMBERLAND DISCOVERS THE TREACHERY THAT HAS BEEN PRACTISED ON HIM.—STRANGE VISITORS.—ANOTHER PROMISE OF PARDON.—OF THE HEADSMAN AND THOSE WHO SOUGHT AN INTERVIEW WITH HIM.—NORTHUMBERLAND'S FATE AND THE DEATH OF MABEL CALCROFT.

On the same night that the Duke of Northumberland had pronounced his abjuration, he was waited on by the lieutenant of the Tower, who came to inform him that the warrant for his execution had been signed by the queen, and that he was ordered to die upon the scaffold on the following morning. When this message was delivered the official retired, but the wretched prisoner had not been left alone any great time before Mabel Calcroft and a stranger, whose features were carefully concealed in the folds of his cloak, entered the dungeon. Northumberland started as he perceived them, but quickly recovering some of his firmness, he exclaimed in a tone of reproach:—

"How now, woman!—Dare you again stand in my presence after having so cruelly deceived me?"

"I have not deceived you," answered Mabel, unmoved by his reproaches. "Your life will yet be spared, for know that I am the bearer of a promise of pardon."

"Indeed!—how is it then that my execution is ordered to take place to-morrow morning?"

"That," answered the old woman, "is merely done to satisfy the people who thirst for your blood. The queen is pleased with what you have done, and your pardon will arrive at the moment when the headsman is about to strike the fatal blow."

"May I depend on your word?"

"You may; and if proof be wanting, my companion here will attest that I speak the truth."

"Who is he," demanded the prisoner eagerly.

"Simon Renard," answered the other, throwing aside, as he spoke, the cloak that had hitherto concealed his countenance.

The duke started at this unexpected meeting, and glancing reproachfully at the ambassador, he said:—

"Why are you here?—have you come to glut your eyes upon the sufferings you have so basely brought on me?"

"I am come," answered the Spaniard, "to assist this woman in assuring you that your life will be spared at the last moment on certain conditions."

"And what are those conditions?"

"That you remain stedfast in the faith you have recently adopted."

"Has she any reason," demanded the captive, "to believe that I shall so soon forswear myself?"

"At all events," replied Renard, "she thinks it not impossible."

"She will try how far you may be depended on, and, as this old woman has said, you will receive your pardon at the very moment when the arm of the executioner is raised to strike the fatal blow."

"I place no reliance in the word of one who has so shamefully deceived me," replied Northumberland. "The queen's word is broken, and I had but just now made up my mind to turn once more to the Protestant faith, and with my latest breath to exhort the spectators of my doom to avoid the hateful errors of your doctrines."

"Beware how you cast away your life by such an act of madness!" cried the Spaniard. "Recollect pardon is offered you on one condition, and if you perish the fault will be your own."

"Do you vouch for the truth of what you have uttered?" asked the captive inspired with renewed hope.

"I do," returned the other, "remain stedfast in your new faith, and you have nothing to dread."

"I will," exclaimed Northumberland after a brief pause. "I have been deceived once and may be so again, yet placing full reliance on your words, I will wait even till the last moment in expectation that the queen will keep her royal word in my favour. Nay, more, from that period,—foe as you have ever proved yourself,—I will endeavour to esteem you as a friend."

"I do not aspire to that honour," answered the ambassador, in a tone of utter contempt.

"And you, Mabel Calcroft," continued the duke, affecting not to hear the latter observation; "how can I repair the injuries my suspicions have done you?"

"Oh!" answered the old woman, with a malicious grin of exultation. "I doubt not but you will amply atone for all, ere we are many hours older!"

"What mean you?" demanded the captive, whose suspicions were aroused by the tone of triumph in which this was pronounced. "But now you professed a wish to serve me, and yet directly upon it your manner would almost serve to convince me that you are still my foe."

"Oh, take no notice of her," exclaimed Simon Renard; "she raves at times and scarcely knows what she utters.".

"Again I ask whether I can rely upon the hope you have held out?" cried the duke, in a state of fearful suspense. "Speak, Simon Renard, will the queen spare me on condition that I do not renounce my newly-adopted faith upon the scaffold?"

"Nay, that is not the only condition," replied the Spaniard; "her majesty is a good Catholic, and desiring to bring all people to that religion, she requires you at the last moment to exhort them to throw aside the heresy that has of late years crept into her realm."

"Even that will I do to obtain a few years of repentance," answered Northumberland. "Say, therefore, to Queen Mary that her command shall be obeyed, and that in the event of my life being spared she shall henceforth find me amongst the most dutiful and loyal of her subjects."

"It is enough," exclaimed Renard; "our business is now settled, and I therefore leave you until we meet again to-morrow upon the scaffold."

"Where, I trust," added Northumberland, "you will have to congratulate me on my restoration to liberty, and the favour of my sovereign."

Simon Renard made no reply, but took his departure from the dungeon, followed by Mabel Calcroft, to whom he muttered as they went:—

"Well, old woman, how say you? have you not obtained a glorious revenge against the man you have sworn to bring to destruction?"

"He will die," she replied, thoughtfully, "and yet I shall not survive to enjoy my long sought vengeance."

"Psha! what fool's whim have you got hold of now?" demanded the Spaniard.

"It is no fool's whim as you will find out by-and-bye," she replied. "I have spoken the truth, and a few hours will serve to prove that I am no bad prophetess."

By this time they had left that portion of the fortress in which the prison of the Duke of Northumberland was situated, and from thence directing their steps across the Tower Green, they entered a low portal, and from thence ascended a flight of winding steps to an apartment above, the door of which being partly open, discovered to them the grim form of Mark Hempseed, the executioner, who was seated in his chair asleep, whilst before him lay the axe which he had been preparing for the bloody work it was to perform the following morning. The footsteps of his visitors, however, served to rouse him from his slumbers, and starting from his sleep he enquired eagerly the cause of their unexpected presence.

"Tush, man, do not be alarmed," exclaimed Renard; "we have come on a little private business, that's all, so sit down, good Mark, and attend to what I am about to say to you."

"Ugh!" growled the headsman, "by your civility, I suppose you require some favour from me?"

"That cannot be a favour which is well paid for," answered the Spaniard, taking from his pocket a well filled purse of gold, which he adroitly slipped into the hand of Mark Hempseed. "I would certainly make a request, but at the same time will not expect its performance without a full and ample remuneration for your trouble."

"Say the word and it shall be done," replied the executioner, weighing the purse in his hand with evident satisfaction. "I am used to taking life, as your excellency knows full well, and if there happens to be an enemy in your path, tell me who he is, and he shall cease to be troublesome almost as soon as I receive your commands."

"You mistake me, good Mark," replied the Spaniard, "I seek no man's death, but you have a prisoner to execute in the morning, and I would give you a piece of advice how to proceed in the matter."

"Humph!" ejaculated the headsman; "I never allow any body to give me advice in anything where my own business is concerned. "However, you have not been niggardly in paying for the privilege, so speak out, and perhaps you may not find me over particular about a trifle or or two."

"I was observing," resumed Simon Renard, "that you have a prisoner to execute to-morrow, and ——"

"You are quite right," interrupted Mark Hempseed, "the duke dies to-morrow morning, and I have, as you may see, been preparing for it. The axe is ready, and the arm shall not flinch when the hour of vengeance arrives."

"That," exclaimed Renard, "is the point I wished to speak to you about. Northumberland expects to receive the queen's pardon at the very last moment; he is, however, deceived, and I would now counsel you to suffer no delay to take place when once his head is on the block."

"There shall not be an instant lost," returned the other. "I have received my reward, and will fairly earn it."

"Do so," answered Simon Renard, "and the sum contained in that purse shall be doubled."

"Ha! ha! ha!" chuckled Mark, "'tis an honest way to gain money, and why should I refuse it? Your excellency has used most powerful argument to bring me to your way of thinking, and rely on it I will claim your promised liberality within an hour after the duke's head has been severed from his body."

"I know you, Master Hempseed, and will take your word for the fulfilment of your promise," cried Mabel Calcroft. "I have ever hated this proud duke, and his death will afford the vengeance I have so long desired."

"Then perhaps, dame, you will add something to the reward his excellency has already bestowed upon me?"

"I am poor," answered the old woman, "and have scarcely enough to procure the bare necessaries for existence."

"Poor!" exclaimed the headsman, pointing towards the diamond broach which had been given to her not long since by Queen Jane. "Do you call yourself poor, whilst in possession of a jewel that might prove a sufficient ransom even for a king?"

"True," answered Mabel; "I had forgotten this gem. It is said to be of great price, but my own hours are numbered, and therefore it is of little use to me, though, to speak the truth, I had intended it as a dying gift to my grandson."

"Never mind, old woman, he must do without it," exclaimed the headsman."

"Then take it," she replied handing the broach to Mark. "It is yours, but remember, let the blow fall quickly lest a pardon should arrive for the duke, and my vengeance be cheated of its promised victim."

"It shall be done, Mabel," exclaimed Mark Hempseed, gazing with admiration on the glittering gem. "I have been long striving amidst poverty and disgrace, but the presents I have received this night have made me rich. To-morrow is appointed for the execution, and depend on it you shall not have to reproach me for having failed in any part of my promise."

Satisfied with this assurance, neither Renard nor Mabel Calcroft wish to urge the matter any further, and bidding the executioner good night, they left his cheerless apartment and descended the winding staircase by which they had made their approach. On reaching the court yard, they looked cautiously around them to see whether any body was near, but on perceiving that they were unobserved, they separated in silence, and pursuing opposite directions, made their way towards their several apartments, each anxious for the morrow that was to bring them the vengeance they desired.

We will not attempt to describe the agonized feelings of the imprisoned duke throughout his anxious night. Half distrustful of the promise of pardon that had been held out to him, he prepared himself for the worst by prayer and entreaties to heaven for forgiveness, and when the guard came in the morning to conduct him to the scaffold, they found him perfectly resigned to whatever destiny might be intended for him.

With a firm step he took his place in the procession which led him to the place where the Sheriffs of Middlesex and their officers were waiting to demand the prisoner. From hence they passed onwards with slow and solemn steps, until they crossed the drawbridge to Tower Hill, from whence a raised platform conducted them to the scaffold, round which an immense crowd of eager spectators had assembled. As the duke moved forward, he could perceive by the murmurs with which his appearance was hailed, that he had little commisseration from the crowd, and on reaching the scaffold, a general groan of indignation burst forth that sounded in his ears like a cry of vengeance.

He now knelt down to pray, and having thus occupied himself for some few minutes, rose again from his attitude of supplication, and advanced to the railings from whence he addressed the multitude, assuring them of his perfect resignation, and, according to the promise he had made, exhorting those among his auditors who were Protestants, to cast aside their heresy at once, and become converts to the Romish Faith. This done, he again knelt down, and having offered up another prayer to heaven, laid his neck upon the block, and ere another instant had elapsed, his head was severed from the trunk, by one well aimed blow of the executioner's axe.

At that moment a piercing cry was heard in the midst of the crowd, and shortly afterwards the breathless body of an aged female was lifted up to the scaffold, and placed at the feet of Simon Renard. For some time the Spaniard dared not look upon the lifeless form before him, but when at last his eyes were turned in that direction, he beheld the pale and inanimate form of Mabel Calcroft, whose omen respecting her own fate was perfectly realized.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OF THE MEANS THAT ARE USED TO MAKE CONVERTS OF THE LADY JANE AND LORD GUILDFORD DUDLEY.—FATHER PAUL'S VISIT TO THE CAPTIVE.—JANE'S FIRMNESS DISPLAYED, AND THE MAGNANIMITY WITH WHICH SHE DISMISSES THE CONFESSOR FROM HER PRESENCE.

From the period of Queen Mary's entry into the Tower of London, Lady Jane and her husband, Lord Guildford Dudley, were kept close prisoners in different parts of the fortress. It was the policy of the queen to keep them thus long in suspense, in order that she might the more readily compel them to abjure their religion, as the Duke of Northumberland had done, and to effect this object no schemes were left untried that might in any way conduce to that end. Both the prisoners were daily visited by Roman Catholic priests, who strove to the utmost of their zeal to make converts of them; but it is almost needless to say that upon neither of them did the prayers and threats with which they were assailed produce any of the desired effect.

At length, Father Paul, one of the queen's chaplains, was entrusted with the task of bringing them to the old faith, and to do him justice he left no means untried, to force them to embrace his views. Even falsehoods were invented, when all other schemes were in vain, and since these were attended with no better results, it began to be suggested whether they should not be forced, by the assistance of torture, to yield up their own religious doctrines. This, however, from motives of prudence, was to be the last alternative employed, and as Father Paul had yet some hopes that his own course would prevail, he again visited the Lady Jane in her prison, for the purpose of inducing her to renounce her religion. He told her that by doing so she would secure the queen's favour both for herself and her husband; that their salvation depended upon their becoming converts, and that in fact, Lord Guildford Dudley had already yielded to the voice of reason and self-interest. This latter declaration startled the fair captive, and clasping her hands with agony, she declared her disbelief of the assertion, until further proof had been brought forward of his having been terrified into submission.

"I have spoken the truth, lady," exclaimed the confessor, persisting in the falsehood he had uttered. "Lord Dudley has yielded to the voice of reason, and his life will be spared on condition that you consent to follow his example."

"Never !" cried the Lady Jane, firmly. "If my husband is indeed guilty of the foul crime you have named, I pray heaven to forgive him, but never will I seek the queen's favour by an act that would steep my soul in perjury !"

"Will you not do it to save your husband ?" demanded the wily priest.

"I will cheerfully lay down my life to save his," answered Jane, fervently; "but no consideration on earth shall ever induce me to become an apostate from my religion."

"Then you act most unwisely," replied the confessor, "for no other means are left by which you may save yourself."

"I understand you," she replied;—"you would terrify me into compliance, by insinuating that we are both to perish on the scaffold, unless these cruel demands of the queen are complied with !"

"Of that," answered Father Paul, "there can be no doubt. You have usurped the throne that by right of birth belongs to our Soverign Lady, Queen Mary, and consequently have well merited the doom that always awaits the traitor."

"And I am ready to meet that doom" replied Jane, unappalled by the threat. "Life has been to me a weary burden, and welcome indeed will be the hour that relieves me from it."

"This is madness, lady," exclaimed the priest, who was still anxiously bent on the accomplishment of his purpose. "The queen has it in her power to render your future days happy and blessed, and nothing will afford her so much pleasure as to pardon Lord Guildford Dudley through your means."

"Through my means !" cried Jane.

"Aye,—your conversion will be immediately followed by a free pardon both for yourself and husband."

"Alas !" exclaimed Jane; "it is in vain for you to plead any further upon this subject. Gladly would I have saved Dudley's life, but it can never be at the expense of my conversion to a faith that I abhor. Return therefore to her majesty,—say I am ready to die whenever it shall be her will to order it; and, as my last and most earnest request, implore her to spare the life of my husband, who, if he has erred at all, has done so in what he considered a lawful and just cause."

"Such an answer as that," returned the confessor, "would serve rather to injure than serve your cause."

"Yet it is the only one I can give," answered Jane. "My heart is firmly set upon my faith, and no earthly consideration shall ever induce me to abandon it. You may therefore leave me, and convey my message to the queen, your mistress."

"Before I go," exclaimed Father Paul, "I must deliver the words of your husband. He beseeches you not to send him to death when it is in your power to save him from a doom he dreads to think of."

"Ha ! does he then fear to die in so good a cause ?"

"He does,—and implores you to pause, ere you throw away the last remaining hope of safety."

"In mercy do not speak to me any further upon so painful a subject," cried the Lady Jane, imploringly. "Go to Lord Guildford Dudley, and bid him await his doom as fearlessly as I do; say that I will pray heaven to give him strength under this great trial, but assure him that no prayers or entreaties, even from himself, will make me forget the duty I owe to the supreme author of my existence."

"To send such a message to your husband," answered the confessor, "would be to tell him in plain terms that you no longer love him."

"Dudley knows to the contrary, and he will never believe that I have forgotten my duty to him," replied Jane, with all the calmness she could command. "He may have sent to make this request, but a brief consideration will serve to convince him that I have acted as becomes a Christian."

"Then you have no other reply to send him?"

"None other."

The confessor paused for a brief space, as if about to urge some further arguments, but the resolution expressed in the countenance of the fair captive proved the utter uselessness of saying anything further upon the subject at present, and bowing his head with affected humility, he slowly retired from the apartment.

As Father Paul retired, the firmness of the Lady Jane seemed for the moment to forsake her, and throwing herself back upon her chair, she gave way to a flood of tears.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GILBERT HEMMINGSLEY ONCE MORE MAKES HIS APPEARANCE.—THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF SYBILLA, AND THE RESOLUTIONS FORMED THEREON.—MARTIN FETTERLOCK ARRIVES, AND THE TRICK THAT IS PLAYED HIM BY THE DWARF.—GILBERT COMMENCES HIS SEARCH THROUGH THE SACRED VAULTS, AND THE SUCCESS THAT REWARDS HIM.

Gilbert Hemmingsley, who we have lost sight of for some time, was liberated from his dungeon within a few days after the execution of the Duke of Northumberland, though on an understanding that he was to consider himself a prisoner on parole, and with a strict charge that he was not to leave the fortress on any consideration whatever.

Upon being thus far set at liberty, his first thought was to visit Ralph Dalston at the Stone Kitchen, in order to enquire after Sybilla, respecting whose fate he was in utter ignorance, from the period at which the Lady Jane and Lord Guildford Dudley had been brought back as prisoners to the Tower. To his consternation and alarm however, he learnt that neither Ralph nor his wife knew anything further about her than that she was somehow or other most unaccountably missing, and that, in spite of all their efforts to discover her, her present destiny was wrapt in the most complete mystery. This was a source of the deepest affliction to Gilbert, and for some time after he had received the intelligence, he remained absorbed in the most painful reflections. At last, however, remembering that instant measures must be adopted for her recovery, he roused himself to exertion, and addressing himself to Dame Margaret Dalston, enquired whether anything had been seen or heard of her since the time when she went to Sion House in the suite of Lady Jane Dudley.

"Alas, no!" answered the old woman despondingly; "from the day that she left us to follow that unfortunate lady, we have never seen anything of her."

"Have you sent to Sion House to make enquiries?" asked Gilbert.

"We have," replied the old woman, "and from what the servants tell us, it seems that she was fetched away from that place by some strange man in disguise, who told her that he had been sent by us to bring her back to our lodgings in the Tower."

"Hah!" exclaimed Gilbert, "a light breaks upon me.—The villain who thus deceived her could have been no other than Martin Fetterlock, the gaoler."

"That's exactly what I thought myself," answered Dame Dalston. "I know very well what sort of character he is, and at once the thought came into my head that this was one of his wild tricks to get her again into his power."

"But have you taxed him with his perfidy?" demanded Gilbert impatiently.

"No," replied the old woman, "for that would have been a wilful tempting of danger. Martin Fetterlock is a fierce bad man, and would not hesitate to do us a mischief if ever we were foolish enough to offend him."

"I will run the risk of his displeasure at any rate," exclaimed Gilbert Hemmingsley. "He has not hesitated to commit a cowardly attack upon a defenceless woman, and he shall yet learn that there is one who will call him to an account he little reckons on!"

"Be careful what you do, good Master Gilbert," cried the alarmed Dame. "Fetterlock has great friends in the fortress, and will not fail to procure your ruin as soon as he finds you are troublesome to him. He is hand and glove with that terrible Spaniard, Simon Renard, and between them it would be no hard matter to lock up an innocent man in some of our dungeons, so that he should never again have a chance of seeing the blessed light of day,"

"I care not though he does his worst," exclaimed Gilbert. "I know him for a villain, and never will I desist until I have rescued the unfortunate Sybilla from his clutches."

"Bravely said," exclaimed a voice from behind them, and the next moment, Hugh, the gigantic warder, presented himself to their view. You have spoken well, young man; Martin Fetterlock is, to my certain knowledge, a villain; and if you are going to drag him out from his den of darkness, I care not how soon I may be called on to give you all the assistance in my power."

"Humph!" ejaculated Dame Margaret Dalston, "it is well to hear you talking so bravely Master Hugh, but how is it, if you have so much spirit that you cannot manage your newly married wife, who, if report speaks not untruly, has contrived to get the upper hand of you?"

"Not a word on that subject, good Dame, if you love me," exclaimed the giant. "Family matters should never be meddled with, and as for the lady you speak of, perhaps the least that's said about it, just at this moment, the better will it be for all parties."

"Aye, aye, but Dame Dalston is in the right though," cried little Kit, the dwarf, who had approached unseen, and to whom this subject afforded infinite gratification. "I was as much in love with the widow, Tabitha Tickletrout, as any man in his senses could well be, but you chose to cut me out Hugh, and now you have caught a tartar."

"Why thou little mis-shapen imp of the devil," exclaimed the giant, "if thou hadst not ensconsed thine ugly carcase behind Dame Dalston, I would have spitted thee on my sword like a snipe. And yet thou art beneath my notice, and therefore may escape with impunity."

"Then we will now return to the subject I was speaking about before this interruption," interposed Gilbert. "I was saying that Martin Fetterlock is a villain, and that he shall either deliver up Sybilla in safety, or receive that punishment which his crimes have long cried loudly for."

"Have you any idea where the girl is to be found," asked Hugh.

"None whatever."

"Then," resumed the giant, "I think I can afford some clue. There are dungeons within this fortress that are known only to Martin Fetterlock, and if we could only contrive to find our way to them, I'll answer for it, the deliverance of Sybilla would very soon take place."

"But how," asked Gilbert, "are the dungeons you speak of to be found."

"Easily enough," answered the warder. "I know the entrance that leads to a whole range of them, and should have paid them a visit before now, only that Martin always takes especial care to keep the keys of them at his girdle."

"Then if we could by any means contrive to get possession of those keys ——"

"The rest of the business would follow easily enough," interrupted Hugh. "I could take you to the place, and then I'll dare be sworn you would not be long pondering what to do. But, hush! here comes the very man we are speaking of, and if any body can be clever enough to secure his keys, he may count upon my friendship for the future."

"Trust that part of the business to me, and it shall be done to your satisfaction," whispered Christopher Dumps. "I have performed more difficult feats than this, and if I fail, never look upon me again as long as I live."

Hugh could not reply to this on account of the near approach of Martin Fetterlock, but stooping his bulky form, he patted the dwarf on the back by way of encouragement to proceed fearlessly in his design.

"You are the man I was in search of," exclaimed the gaoler, addressing Gilbert, in no very courteous manner.

"And *you*," retorted the other, "were the last person in my thoughts. We are well met, and now, perhaps, you will deign to say why you came in search of me."

"It was to learn your future intentions," replied Fetterlock; "nay, do not look so frowningly upon me—you are still a prisoner here though with more liberty than you formerly enjoyed."

"I am commanded to remain within these walls," answerd Gilbert, "but I have yet to learn that I am any longer to remain under your watchful guardianship."

"Yet it is so," returned the gaoler, gloomily; "and to convince you, here is the warrant that authorizes me to perform the office of your keeper."

"Am I to be again immured in a dungeon?"

"That will depend upon your own prudence," answered Fetterlock. "At present you have the liberty of ranging wherever you please about this fortress, but it is on condition that I do not lose sight of you for any long time together."

"Then having seen me you can now depart, well assured that I am secure in your reach."

"But before I go," answered Fetterlock, "you must tell me where you intend to lodge."

"Here," replied Gilbert; "beneath the roof of Master Ralph Dalston."

"It is enough, and I will now leave you to yourself."

"Before you go," exclaimed Gilbert, interposing himself between the gaoler and the door, "I insist upon your telling me, without equivocation, where you have concealed Sybilla?"

"Where you will never find her," answered the other, gloomily.

"Make not to sure of that," exclaimed Gilbert, "Remember, villain, I succeeded in discovering poor Alice—one of your wretched victims—and the same chance that directed me to her cell will, doubtless, aid me also in this instance."

"You are mistaken if you believe so," exclaimed Martin Fetterlock, with an accent of triumph, that he could not conceal. "Both are beyond your power, and the least attempt to rescue them will doom the objects of your commisseration to a death of violence!"

As he spoke thus, the gaoler made a sudden rush past Gilbert, and instantly disappeared.

"You have a queer customer to deal with in that fellow," said Hugh, first breaking the silence that had followed the unexpected departure. "He is not to be easily overcome, I can tell you, and what is worse than all he has made his escape before we had time to secure his keys."

"There you are wrong, Master Warder," cried little Christopher, jumping upon the table and exhibiting a huge bunch of keys which he held in his hand. "I told you I would do the trick and here is the proof of my prowess."

"Why, sure enough the fellow has been as good as his word!" exclaimed Hugh, chuckling with delight. "He has secured the keys, and from this moment he may rely upon me to see him righted in all his quarrels.

But how did you manage it, Kit—how in the name of all that is strange did you contrive to get them so clean away without his finding out what you were after?"

"Oh, it was done easily enough," answered Christopher, not a little proud for the feat he had performed. "Whilst he was talking to Master Gilbert Hemmingsley, I slipped under this great oaken table, and, watching my opportunity, slipped them away with all the adroitness of an experienced thief. Ha! ha! ha! he little dreams of his loss at present, but when he does find it out there will be a storm burst forth that will not be very easy to quiet."

"And if he should happen to guess that you were the perpetrator of the robbery," observed Gilbert, "I fear the consequences will prove most disastrous."

"Kit need not be under much apprehension about that," exclaimed the giant. "I have promised to be his friend and protector in future, and it's not Martin Fetterlock, nor a hundred such scurvy knaves that he need be in fear of after that."

"But the keys are useless to me unless I procure some clue by which to find these secret dungeons," observed Gilbert Hemmingsley.

"I'll do all that for you," returned the giant. "I know about this fortress, and have seen the gaoler gliding more than once towards a place which he seemed to seek with great caution, and which he would never enter without first of all looking cautiously round to see whether any body was watching him, I am somewhat bulky in size to be sure, and yet I so managed to conceal myself that he has never had any suspicion of my having found out his secret."

"Then I may depend upon your guiding me there!" cried Gilbert, eagerly.

"Aye, certainly you may, and as it is now quite dark, I should say the sooner we set out the better.

"I am ready to go with you this instant," answered the squire. "The least delay may prove fatal to those I wish to serve, and if the present opportunity is not seized upon, Martin Fetterlock will discover the loss of his keys, and take measures to prevent my searching these dungeons."

Dame Margaret Dalston, who had been a listener to this conversation, now gave Gilbert a lantern to aid him in his search, and having so placed it beneath his cloak, that no light should be seen, she earnestly implored him not to suffer any difficulties he might encounter to deter him from prosecuting the search, until he had completely succeeded in restoring the maiden to liberty.

"I will perish rather than abandon my object," he replied; "my whole soul is bent upon releasing her from the grasp of that villain, and my future life would be a painful burden were I to yield through cowardice, or suffer her to remain longer in imprisonment."

"I doubt not your zeal in her behalf," answered Dame Dalston, "but Martin Fetterlock is no common enemy to contend against, and I dread lest, when he has discovered the loss of his keys, that he will follow in pursuit, and perhaps sacrifice you to his vengeance."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hugh, "I'll prevent him doing anything of that sort by watching at the entrance till Master Gilbert returns. Martin and I have crossed swords before now, and as he has always come off second best, there is not much fear but what I can prevent his doing any mischief now. So come, sir squire, time is too precious to waste in further parley, and I am quite at your service."

Upon this, Gilbert Hemmingsley and his gigantic guide set forth from the Stone Kitchen, and stealing silently beneath the dark shadow of the lls, they continued to make their way round several of the quadrangles, thout exciting any notice from the few stragglers who happened to be road. At length they reached a low building on the river side, where ugh paused, and speaking in a whisper, he directed the attention of lbert to a door thickly studded with iron nails of immense size, and rough which portal he informed him lay his way towards the dungeons was about to search. Having given this direction, he further informed m that he should keep a close watch hard by, and then gliding away the post he intended to occupy, left the squire to pursue the remain-r of the adventure by himself.

After trying several keys, Gilbert at last found the one which opened e door, and having thus gained admittance, he produced the lantern om beneath his cloak, and took a careful survey of the gloomy place which he found himself. This done, he directed his way through a ark and narrow passage, which, from the time occupied in traversing , seemed to be of great extent. At last, however, he came to a flight steps, which he ascended, and having reached the top, found himself a spacious vault, around the walls of which were several doors, vidently leading to numerous dungeons, unknown to all, save him, who ad used them for his own base purposes. Several of these he opened ith the assistance of the keys with which he was provided, though in one of them did he find the object of his anxious search. Undeterred y his failure, however, he continued his task, until at length, in ne of them, he beheld a corpse lying upon the ground, and upon irecting the glare of his lantern to the countenance, he discovered the ale and emaciated countenance of poor Alice, the unfortunate captive vho had been so many years imprisoned by the cruel and vindictive Martin Fetterlock. On a more minute examination, he saw that her hand clinched within her grasp a piece of paper, which quickly securing, he once more effected his retreat, glad to escape from a sight so horrible and revolting.

Uncertain which way to direct his steps, Gilbert proceeded haphazard, until a low moaning sound met his ears, evidently uttered by some female in the deepest distress. Upon this, he paused to listen, in order to ascertain which direction to take, but by this time the sound had ceased, and he was left in the most cruel state of suspense and anxiety. At a loss what to do in such a case as this, and fearing lest Martin Fetterlock should by this time be in pursuit of him, he hurried wildly onwards, until the same sound, though now much nearer, once more arrested his footsteps. He would have called upon the name of the beloved object of his search, but was restrained by the recollection that such an act of indiscretion would serve as a guide to the gaoler if he should happen to be in pursuit of him, and narrowly examining the walls with the aid of his lantern, he at last discovered a door, so artfully contrived, to resemble the stone work with which it was surrounded, as hitherto to have eluded his observation. This he had no doubt was the entrance to the dungeon of which he was in search, and having at last found the key that fitted the lock, the door slowly turned upon its hinges, and he found himself in a narrow cell, built in the thickness of the wall. At the same moment a piercing shriek rent the air, and a female form rushing towards him, sank exhausted and fainting at his feet.

To his unutterable joy he immediately recognised the form of Sybilla, and raising the maiden in his arms, he bore her with all the speed he could towards the entrance by which he had gained access to these secret dungeons. At the post where he had left him he found Hugh, the giant, anxiously waiting his return, and the latter no sooner perceived him emerge from the gloomy portal, than hastening to his assistance, he too the still fainting form of Sybilla in his arms, and hurried forward to th Stone Kitchen, where Ralph Dalston and his Dame were waiting wit feverish anxiety to learn the result of an expedition on which so muc depended.

CHAPTER XL.

A SCENE IN THE STONE KITCHEN.—THE PLOT OF MARTIN FETTERLOCK IS UNRAVELLED.—NARRATIVE OF POOR ALICE.—A FACT, HITHERTO INVOLVED IN DARKNESS, IS EXPLAINED.—THE ARRIVAL OF MARTIN FETTERLOCK AND THE VIOLENCE HE MANIFESTED AT THE FRUSTRATION OF HIS DESIGNS.—HUGH ACCEPTS THE OFFICE OF CHAMPION —AND THE RESULT.

Under the care and attention bestowed upon her by Dame Margaret Dalston, the fainting girl was soon restored to a state of consciousness, and when she became aware that she was no longer the inmate of a dungeon, but was surrounded by friends rejoicing in her rescue, her gratitude knew no bounds, and pouring forth the fulness of her heart, she expressed in eloquent terms her feelings towards those who had taken so deep an interest in her welfare. To Gilbert Hemmingsley, in particular, she expressed her heartfelt obligations, for the imminent perils he had encountered in her behalf; she was aware too that he now stood in great danger from the implacable vengeance of Martin Fetterlock, for the generous act he had performed, and the reflection of what he might be made to endure, served to throw a damp on the joy she would otherwise have experienced.

She therefore earnestly besought him to effect his escape from the Tower, while it was yet possible to do so, and to take the earliest opportunity of escaping over to France, where he might remain in security until the death of Queen Mary should render his return perfectly safe. But the spirit of Gilbert was above seeking safety in flight; he knew that he was guilty of no crime, and despising the malice of his enemies, he expressed his determination to remain where he was until he had unravelled certain mysteries, which at present involved the fate both of Sybilla and the unfortunate Alice.

This brought to his recollection the scrap of paper which he had taken from the hand of the last named captive, and taking the precious document from his pocket, he read the following lines, which, with an unsteady hand, had been traced upon the paper:—

"Let him whom chance may lead to the discovery of this dying declaration, take upon himself the task of obtaining justice for the persecuted Alice. They say I am mad, and who can wonder at it after enduring eighteen long, weary years of imprisonment? Have I not been the victim of the royal tyrant, Henry the Eighth, whose unlawful love I rejected, to unite myself in the holy bands of wedlock with the Marquis de Montmorency, a French nobleman of vast wealth and influence, and who happened at that period to be living near the English Court? Yet he was privately assassinated on the discovery of our marriage, and scarcely was that crime perpetrated, when I was dragged to the Tower on a charge of treason, and committed to the custody of Martin Fetterlock. There I was delivered shortly afterwards of a daughter, who was stolen from me immediately by my inhuman keeper. The villain declared at t that she was dead, but I taxed him with deceit, and he acknowledged t she yet survived;—that she was an inmate of the Tower, where she l been brought up by persons in humble circumstances, and that she l been christened by the name of Sybilla.——"

At this moment a cry burst from the lips of the maiden, and she would ve fallen to the floor, had not the powerful arm of Hugh supported . Presently, however, she somewhat recovered herself, and Gilbert mmingsley, trembling with apprehension, thus proceeded with the gular document.

'From that time the cruelty of my gaoler has daily increased; avarice mpted him to sue for my hand, as the only condition by which I could r hope to obtain my liberty. I rejected him with scorn, and the rdships I endured were increased by every means that malice could ggest. I went mad—raved for the restoration of my child, and was swered with reproaches instead of pity. Yet I have long survived all s cruelty, and should perhaps have survived to embrace my daughter ce more, had not the monster withheld my scanty allowance of food. am dying, but chance has placed within my reach, pen, ink, and per—probably left in my cell by some former unfortunate occupant, l I have taken the opportunity to write these few lines, in hopes that y may fall into the hands of some one who will seek out my child, l restore her to the rank from which she has fallen. Let the reader ollect the sufferings of a mother, and heaven's blessings will light on him for aiding the cause of injured virtue, against the oppressions l evil practices of a villain.

"ALICE DE MONTGOMERY."

'Tell me, Gilbert, tell me I implore you," cried the agitated Sybilla, 'was it my mother that you say lying dead within her cell, when you ne in search of me?"

'It was," answered the young man.

'And yet," cried the maiden bitterly, "heaven has no avenging bolt strike the villain dead, who could thus trample on and oppress his pless victim.

'Fear not, dearest Sybilla," exclaimed Gilbert; "the hour of retri-ion draws nigh. I will lay this letter before the queen, and surely will not fail to visit with her heaviest punishment the man whose mes have led to the death of one so innocent."

'There you and I differ greatly" interposed Hugh, who had been an ntive, though silent listener to all that had been going on. "Martin terlock, with all his crimes, is likely to prove a useful instrument in hands, and the chances are that he will escape whilst you, who g the charge against him, will fall beneath her displeasure."

Think you then he will escape?" demanded Gilbert.

I am quite sure of it," replied the giant. "There is very little ice to be expected from Queen Mary, unless the persons demanding appen to rank themselves among her friends. You, however, are wn to have been a follower of the late Duke of Northumberland, and matter of course, have very little favour to expect at her hands."

If she slights my just demands," exclaimed Gilbert, "the conse-nces will be upon her own head. I owe the villain, Fetterlock, my tal hatred, and he shall die even though it were in the presence of queen herself."

Forbear, Gilbert!—forbear—I entreat you!" cried Sybilla, in an y of terror. "You have powerful enemies to cope against, and will surely perish should you do aught to anger one so vindictive Mary."

"Oh, never fear for him, young lady," cried Hugh, subdued by maiden's alarm. "He will get into no mischief I'll warrant you, fc myself bear no great deal of good will towards this Martin Fetterlo and if he only gives me occasion for a quarrel, let him look to it, for have no more mercy on him than he had for poor Alice, your moth

"Well said, Hugh," exclaimed Dame Dalston, "I love a lad of me and speaking your mind out like that does my old heart good. Ma Fetterlock has carried it all his own way too long, and there's very in this fortress but will be glad to see him lowered a bit, even thougl may be at the expense of his life."

"Speak lower, Dame," whispered Ralph Dalston; "the man you speaking of comes this way, and if he should chance to hear words those uttered, it's most likely that both you and I should, ere long, less comfortable quarters here than we are at present suffered to enjc

"Let him do his worst," answered the dame; "I fear him not."

As she finished speaking, Martin Fetterlock entered the Stone Kitcl and no sooner did he perceive that Sybilla formed one of the pers assembled there, than a marked and fearful change was visible in countenance. At first he started with horror, as though the grave given up its tenant, but quickly recovering himself, he darted a loo maglignant fierceness upon Gilbert Hemmingsley, and exclaimed voice of thunder :—

"Villain! this is some of your doing. You have dared to se liberty one of the queen's prisoners, and you shall answer for it your life."

"I am ready to answer for it in any way her majesty shall thin to command," replied Gilbert, unmoved by the violence of his anta nist. "Take me before the queen, and if, after hearing my versio this story, she still leans to the side of violence, I will submit witl a murmur to any decree she may think proper to pronounce."

"Are you willing to follow me without offering resistance?"

"I am," answered the youth firmly; "that is to say on condi that the maiden I have rescued, she be henceforth free from further persecutions."

"I will make no promise of the kind," exclaimed Fetterlock. " is my prisoner, and since you have dared to rescue her, she must turn to her place of confinement until the queen's further pleasure s be known."

"Villain!" cried Gilbert Hemmingsley, resolutely, "I will defend against you with my life."

"Humph! your life is now of very little con uence, I belie retorted the gaoler. "The offence you have committed is not lik to be looked over very lightly, and, doubtless, the queen will see fi punish it on the scaffold."

"Then Master Gilbert Hemmingsley will be a fool, begging his don, if he trusts himself to her tender mercies," exclaimed Hugh, giant. "For my part, were I in his place, I would take care to l my liberty as long as I was able, and the first man that was sent to m me his prisoner should have about a dozen inches of my sword thro his body."

Hah!" vociferated Fetterlock, "do *you*—one of the queen's serva counsel him to resist the royal authority."

"No," answered the giant, "but I counsel him to resist yours tho

and more than that he shall have my assistance if he needs it, to keep you at a proper distance."

"I'll try your courage another time, Master Hugh," exclaimed Fetterlock, grinding his teeth with rage. "At present, I shall content myself with taking this wench with me, and if she escapes again from my custody it shall not be from any want of caution on my part."

As he said this, he advanced to sieze upon the trembling girl, but ere he could effect this object, both Gilbert and Hugh had placed themselves in such a position as to prevent his nearer approach. The giant however, seemed determined to take this quarrel upon himself, and thrusting the squire on one side, he drew his rapier, and addressing himself to Martin Fetterlock, said in a menacing tone:—

"Beware, Master gaoler, how you tempt a desperate man to strike a blow that will send your black and guilty soul to another world. This girl is now under my protection, and I will defend her to the last, so look to yourself, for I will have no mercy if you offer to approach another step."

"Then take your punishment from my hands!" exclaimed Martin Fetterlock, raising his sword, and rushing forward to sieze upon Sybilla. But this act was bitterly avenged by the giant, whose sword's point entered the breast of the gaoler, and passed completely through his body. A single groan was all he uttered as he reeled bleeding to the floor, and ere another minute had elapsed, the miserable culprit ceased to exist.

Great was the consternation that ensued upon the termination of this unexpected event, which, though accidental on the part of Hugh, was likely to bring all concerned with him into serious trouble. Sybilla had fainted the moment she saw their swords drawn, and Dame Margaret Dalston uttered such loud lamentations on the conclusion of the catastrophe, as to draw the attention of the guard to the house, and within a few minutes afterwards the place was filled with soldiers. The horrid spectacle before them plainly told the sanguinary tale, and as all present were supposed to have participated in the deed, every one was arrested and hurried off to the guard-room to await the further orders of her majesty.

For some time after their arrival in these quarters the prisoners maintained a profound silence, being too much occupied with their own reflections to enter into conversation with each other. Gilbert Hemmingsley had scarcely recovered from the consternation into which he had been thrown by the event which had led to the predicament into which they were now placed, and as for Hugh, he appeared to regard with sullen indifference any result to which his late violence might lead. By-and-bye, however, he appeared to grow weary of this long silence, and believing that the squire was brooding over the misfortunes which had fallen upon them, he dealt him a smartish blow over the shoulders, exclaiming at the same time with his usual carlessness :—

"Come, come, Master Gilbert, never give way to despair, man ; I have been in as much trouble as this before now, and yet good fortune has always proved my friend, as I dare say it will in the present instance. Cheer up, Sir Squire, and never look forward with despair."

"I do not," replied Gilbert ;—"for myself I care not, though, to confess the truth, I cannot contemplate without shuddering the misery that may yet be the doom of poor Sybilla."

"Why then, make yourself perfectly easy on that head," answered the giant. "Sybilla has nothing to do with the affair that has brought us here ; she is innocent, and who, think you, would dare to injure her for a crime,—if you may call it one—that was committed by me ?"

"But," exclaimed Hemmingsley, "whilst I am shut up here she is left without a protector."

"Nonsense, man," exclaimed the other, "what does she want with a protector now that her only enemy is dead ?"

"I am not certain that she has no other enemies," replied Gilbert. "In fact, I have good reason to suspect that one is still left in the person of the villainous Spaniard."

"What!—Simon Renard ?"

"You have named the person I alluded to."

"Psha !" returned the gigantic warder ; "he will never trouble himself about her, depend on it. Simon Renard has higher game in view, and till he has accomplished all the mischief that is lurking in his brain, he'll never think of worrying a poor girl that I dare say he has hardly thought about."

"But," answered the squire," I have too much reason to believe that she has much to fear from his evil designs."

"Let him try it on then, that's all," exclaimed Hugh, in a tone that showed he was in earnest. "Only let him play any of his tricks in that quarter, and see how long it would be before I served him as I did Martin Fetterlock."

"Alas !" sighed Gilbert Hemmingsley, "you forget, my friend, how impossible it would now be to render her any assistance however much it might be required."

"Why, thou silly boy," cried the giant, glancing his eye round the guard-room, "dost thou think this place is strong enough to hold me if once I should take it into my head to get out ?"

"I should say it would be impossible," answered Gilbert ; "and besides, even if you did succeed in such a mad attempt how soon would your gaolers find means to place you in a dungeon where you would be more secure."

"Aye," exclaimed Hugh, resolutely; "but not before some of the fellows had paid dearly for it. I am a match for some half dozen of them, and they would find it out to before I had done with them."

"But in the end you would be sure to be overpowered and secured."

"Well, well, I don't suppose I shall make the attempt, so you may be quite easy on that head. At present, I shall remain quiet enough in these quarters, because, in my opinion, they'll find out Martin Fetterlock to have been such a villain, that they'll give us our freedom again as soon as ever the matter has been throughly looked into."

At this moment a great hubbub and confusion was heard outside the guard-room, and the door having been hastily thrown open, little Christopher Dumps was thrust in amidst a storm of invectives, that he was hurling at the heads of those who had brought him thither.

"Why how now Kit," exclaimed the giant; "what in the devil's name has brought thee here in this mighty passion?"

"Master Hugh, I am an ill-used individual!" answered the dwarf, almost choking with passion. "They have dragged me here on a charge of being your accomplice in causing the death of Martin Fetterlock; and yonder black-muzzled rascal has dragged me here as if I was a dog going to be hanged!"

"That was your own fault," exclaimed the guard alluded to. "You chose to ride rusty upon the matter, so I was compelled to drag your insignificant little carcase without being very nice about it."

"Insignificant little carcase!" vociferated the dwarf, drawing his sword, which they had not yet deprived him of;—"your words are offensive, sirrah, and thus I'll teach you how to behave in future with proper respect to a gentleman!"

With these words, Christopher threw himself into a heroic attitude, and there is no doubt but that he would have made a desperate attack upon the guard, had not Hugh interposed, by knocking the weapon out of his hand, and then snatching the little fellow up in his arms, he prevailed upon the man to leave the place without delay. Kit spluttered a good deal at this, but Hugh held him with a firm grasp till his rage had evaporated.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE TRIAL OF LADY JANE GREY AND HER CONDEMNATION.—THE PROCESSION TO THE PLACE OF EXECUTION AND HER ADMIRABLE CONDUCT ON THE SCAFFOLD.—SIMON RENARD AGAIN MAKES HIS APPEARANCE.—HIS SINGULAR PROPOSITION.—FATHER PAUL'S LAST EFFORTS TO CONVERT THE LADY JANE.—THE EXECUTION.—CONCLUSION.

ON the 13th of November, the Lady Jane, her husband, two of her brothers-in-law, and Archbishop Cranmer, were all brought to trial, and after going through a mere mockery of justice, a verdict of guilty was pronounced against them all. Instead, however, of being put to death immediately, they were remanded to prison, and no further steps were taken in regard to any of them, till after the occurrence and suppression of the rash insurrection, headed by Sir Thomas Wyatt, in the beginning of the following February. Wyatt himself suffered death for his share in this affair, as did also the Duke of Suffolk, the Lady Jane's father, and his brother. Carte, the historian, informs us that "above fifty gallant officers, knights, and gentlemen were put to death as soon as the rebellion was quelled. There were above four hundred common men executed before March 12th; how many suffered afterwards, does not appear."

But among all who perished in this enormous carnage, there were none whose fate was so much lamented at the time, or has been so long remembered, as the young, beautiful, and accomplished Lady Jane Grey. On the morning of the same day her husband had been executed on the scaffold on Tower Hill, (to the north west of the Tower, at a short distance from the moat), as if to add to the horrors of her situation, it was contrived that the procession that conducted her to the block, should pass shortly after his decapitation, and she had thus the inexpressible agony of witnessing his mangled corpse as it was carried back to the chapel within the fortress. Almost fainting at a sight so terrible, she paused for a few seconds, and burying her face with her hands, besought heaven to grant her firmness to go through the remainder of this bloody ordeal.

Somewhat revived by those holy aspirations she once more followed the executioner and proceeded to the green in front of the chapel, where a scaffold had been erected for the performance of this last sad tragedy. By this time she was tolerably composed and viewed the awful preparations that were made for her death with a degree of firmness, that was perfectly astonishing to the numerous spectators who had assembled to witness the death of one so young, so beautiful, and so innocent. Having mounted the scaffold, she addressed the persons present, acknowledging the unlawfulness of her assumption of the crown, but declaring fervently her innocence of any part "in the procurement and desire thereof." She concluded by requesting the people to assist her with their prayers, and then knelt down, and devoutly repeated one of the psalms. Having risen she declined the assistance of the executioner, who approached to remove the upper part of her dress, and that service was performed by a faithful female attendant, who had persisted in following her even to the place of punishment. This ceremony performed, she approached the block, and knelt down to offer up one more prayer to heaven, but as she did this, her eyes encountered those of Simon Renard, who at that moment was advancing with Father Paul the confessor.

"Lady," he said, stooping, and whispering in her ear, "I grieve to see you in this sad condition, and come once more to offer you pardon and liberty on certain conditions."

"Leave me, Monsieur Renard," exclaimed Jane, in a voice trembling with emotion. "I am come hither prepared to die, and would be permitted to pass the few remaining moments of my life in penitence and prayer."

"I am come hither the messenger of pardon," answered the Spaniard. "The queen offers you mercy, and surely you will not refuse the gift at such a moment as this. Remember, lady, life is valuable to all, and should not be heedlessly thrown away."

"Alas!" cried Jane, with a burst of grief, "what have I to live for? But a brief time since I beheld the headless form of my husband borne towards yonder chapel, and, since he is dead, I will ask no mercy for myself."

"But there is another that loves you," whispered Renard.

"Ha! do you allude to yourself?"

"I do;—obtain pardon from the queen,—become a proselyte to my religion, and henceforth you shall find in me both a husband and a friend."

"Monster!" cried Jane, overwhelmed at his presumption.

"Nay, I am not the monster you deem me," he replied. "I would save you from death, or you would not have seen me here at such a moment as this. Say, then, that you will be mine,—promise to abjure your religion, and I possess the power to bear you from this place to one of safety."

"In heaven's name, I charge you to leave me," she cried with emotion, "Here, at least, I ought to be safe from your insults, and, if need be, will call to some of the guards to remove you by force."

"You absolutely refuse my offer then?"

"I have already told you so."

"Then your blood be upon your own head, for I have no longer the power to save you," he exclaimed, and then mingling in the crowd, he sent Father Paul forward to see what effect his address would have upon his unfortunate victim.

"Daughter," exclaimed the confessor, "it seems you have rejected the intreaties of Monsieur Renard to become a convert to our holy religion. It is sad to behold one so young die in the errors of heresy, and I have therefore ventured to come forward in order to prevail upon you to accept the mercy offered by the queen, my royal mistress."

"I ask for no mercy," replied Jane, firmly. "I have come here to lay down my life, and am prepared to meet my doom with cheerfulness and resignation."

"But know you not that it will be in vain to expect mercy hereafter, unless you die in the full faith of our Holy Church?"

"On the contrary," she replied, "I know that I should forfeit my chance of seeing heaven, were I weakly to be terrified into embracing a religion that I have always been taught to regard as abounding with abominations. I feel confident in my own hopes, and therefore no intreaties,—no offers that the queen can make will deter me from dying in the faith I have professed through life."

"Am I then to tell the queen that you refuse her mercy?"

"You may tell her majesty," answered Jane, "that I thank her for whatever good she intended, and that I die forgiving her any share she may have had in procuring my death. Thus much you may do, and now, having received my final answer, it is my request that you leave me to myself during the few short moments I have to exist."

The confessor finding her thus resolute, slowly retired, and being once more left to herself, Lady Jane composed herself by prayer, and exclaiming "Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit," received the fatal stroke.

Her demeanour was throughout touchingly resigned and beautiful, and altogether in harmony with the gentle tenor of her whole previous life. Lady Jane Grey, who was thus cut off before she had completed her seventeenth year, was already one of the most accomplished and erudite of her sex, in any age, abounding in learned females. She is said to have been a perfect mistress of the French, Latin, and Greek languages.

Having thus nearly brought our narrative to a conclusion, it is necessary that we return to the party which had been arrested in the Stone Kitchen immediately after the death of Martin Fetterlock. By the queen's command a rigid examination was entered into, for the purpose of ascertaining all the facts connected with the charge brought against the prisoners. This circumstance gave Gilbert Hemmingsley an opportunity to enter into a full explanation of the cruelties inflicted upon Alice de Montmorency and her daughter by the gaoler. He produced the paper which he had taken from the unfortunate prisoner, and demanded that a full inquiry should be made into the truth of the allegation made therein. This, after some hesitation, was agreed to, and on its appearing that Martin Fetterlock had provoked the fate he met with, all the prisoners were allowed to depart, on condition that they remained within the fortress until a further enquiry had been made into the subject.

At length, after the lapse of nearly three months, it was proved to the entire satisfaction of the queen that Sybilla was indeed the heiress to vast estates of the late Marquis de Montmorency, and as no crime had ever imputed to her, she received the royal permission to leave the country, in order that she might go over to France and take possession of her extensive domains. Previous to doing this, however, she bestowed her hand upon Gilbert Hemmingsley, who, tired of the persecution he had endured here, took adieu of his native land, and returned not to it again until the accession of Queen Elizabeth to the throne, gave promise of happier times for England.

The reign of Mary is too memorable to require much comment in this place. The flames she lit up in Smithfield for the destruction of Protestantism is alone sufficient to hand her name down to posterity with execration and disgust. Her bigotry knew no bounds, and her hatred towards all who differed with her in religion, is not to be excused, even by those who are inclined to grant her the possession of some good qualities.

Simon Renard, the Spanish Ambassador, was her chief adviser in matters of religion, and so well did he execute the mission with which he was entrusted by King Philip of Spain, that he subsequently brought about a union between him and Mary, which tended, doubtless, in a great measure, to bring about the cruel persecution inflicted upon her Protestant subjects.

As for the giant warders, it is sufficient to observe that they retained their situations, and even little Christopher Dumps was appointed to an office of some trust in The Tower of London.

THE END.

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